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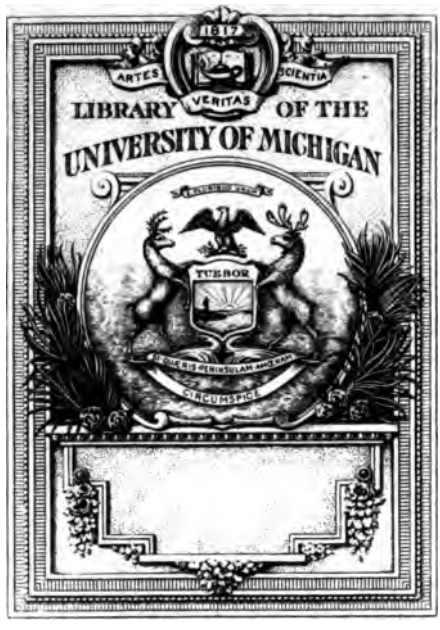
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WAGNER AND HIS WORKS

VOL. I

Richard Wagner

WAGNER AND HIS WORKS

THE STORY OF HIS LIFE

WITH CRITICAL COMMENTS

BY

HENRY T. FINCK

VOLUME I

FIFTH EDITION

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TO

ANTON SEIDL

of whom Wagner wrote in his last letter, "Seidl delights me greatly," and who first made Americans acquainted with the greatest of Wagner's music-dramas — "Tristan and Isolde," "Die Meistersinger," and the Nibelung Tetralogy — this book is dedicated by the author as a slight return for the pleasure so often received from his poetic and inspired interpretations.

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PREFACE

ALTHOUGH only half a century has elapsed since Richard Wagner first became prominent as an operatic composer, it may be safely asserted that more has already been written and printed about him than about any other dramatic author excepting Shakespeare. To add to this collection two more volumes may seem a rash and superfluous proceeding; but if the reader will take the trouble to compare these volumes with other works on the same subject, he will see at a glance that the biographic treasures had been very far from exhausted by my predecessors. There are many short Wagner biographies in the market, written by Tappert, Muncker, Pohl, Nohl, Gaspérini, Hueffer, Dannreuther, Kobbé, and others. Several of these are excellent in their way, but they all attempt to present, in from a hundred to two hundred pages, a subject which requires a thousand pages for adequate treatment.

The only two elaborate biographies are Glasenapp's and Jullien's. Glasenapp, having been the first in the field, had to do some hard pioneer work, for which he deserves credit. But his treatise exists only in German, and it will probably never be translated, as it is too verbose, and contains too many dry details of merely local interest. Nor is it complete; it ends with the *Parsifal*

year, and gives no account of Wagner's death. The operas, too, are not analyzed; it is simply a biography. Jullien's book is valuable for its numerous portraits, caricatures, and other illustrations, as well as for the light it throws on the French episodes in Wagner's life, although in this respect Servières's *Wagner Jugé en France* is more complete and entertaining. For other than French readers Jullien presents his subject from too Gallic a point of view. Apparently he does not read German, since he gets his views of Wagner's literary and theoretical works at second hand, from Grove's Dictionary and other sources; but his greatest blemish is his total inability to understand Wagner's character. This character, owing to peculiar circumstances, was, indeed, often as difficult to understand as the "Art-work of the Future" itself. But in the case of a man who has so many enemies as Wagner had, it is the duty of a biographer to carefully verify all statements, and not to accept as gospel truth stories manufactured by hostile newspapers. Wagner's personality, as presented by Jullien, is as much of a caricature as any of the pictures in his book.

While Jullien misrepresents his character, the other biographers, including Glasenapp, have very little to say about it, devoting themselves chiefly to his writings, musical and literary. It is, indeed, only since the appearance of all the biographies here mentioned, that an opportunity has been given us to see the real Wagner. The three volumes of letters to Liszt, Uhlig, Fischer, and Heine have thrown a flood of light on his personality, and my cordial thanks are due to the publishers for permission to make use of this invaluable source of information regarding the most important creative period

in Wagner's life, the years of his exile. I also wish to thank Messrs. Longmans, Green, and Co. for permission to quote from the interesting new material, including forty Wagner letters, contained in Praeger's *Wagner as I Knew Him;* and Mr. Theodore Thomas for kindly placing at my disposal all the correspondence relating to the Centennial March. Of other new sources of information, I must mention the fifteen letters to Frau Wille, printed in the *Deutsche Rundschau* in 1887 — letters which bring the most romantic episode in Wagner's life — his friendship with King Ludwig — vividly before our eyes; and Oesterlein's monumental *Wagner Katalog* in three volumes, containing references to about 30,000 letters and other documents bearing on Wagner and his friends and artists — a work which immensely facilitated my researches in German libraries. Personally I am indebted to Herr Oesterlein for placing the treasures of his Museum, including some valuable manuscripts, at my disposal, at a considerable sacrifice of his time.

I think I may safely say that I am indebted to previous biographers for less than a twentieth part of the material contained in these two volumes; all the rest is based on my personal experiences, on Wagner's own autobiographic writings, and other original documents, including a collection of Wagneriana which I began seventeen years ago, and which I have found of great use, especially in the chapters relating to the critics. Some readers may think that too much space has been devoted to these hostile criticisms, and that some of the quotations are cruel, inasmuch as the writers have since become partial or complete converts. I have indeed *mercilessly quoted their own words,* but the cruelty is not

mine. These critics are self-impaled; they helped to make Wagnerian history, and I, as veracious historian, am bound to chronicle the facts. Besides, these men had no end of fun in ridiculing Wagner and his admirers in former years; now that the tide has turned, have we not a right to a little fun at their expense? The comicality of these criticisms will, like good wine, still further improve with age; and these opinions have also a serious value as contributions to the history of æsthetic taste. Schiller once suggested that the hundreds of similar criticisms on him and Goethe should be collected for such a purpose.

As regards the plan of this book, I have endeavored to avoid what might be called the chronological-mosaic style of biography, which consists in presenting the facts in loose connection, in the year and month they occurred in. The arrangement here adopted of presenting the various phases of Wagner's history, activity, and personality in pictures complete in themselves, without neglecting the main chronological divisions, will, I hope, commend itself to the reader. This method is facilitated by the roving life Wagner led — the constant changes of residence from Dresden to Paris, to London, Vienna, Venice, Zürich, Lucerne, etc., which add so much to the interest of his career. The frequent subdivisions into chapters and sub-chapters make it easy for readers who care only for the biography, to skip the other parts. But Wagner the man was so thoroughly identified with Wagner the artist, that a complete biography had to include a consideration of his works too.

H. T. F.

New York, March 1, 1893.

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PRELUDE. — POETIC PROPHECIES

"Hitherto Apollo has always distributed the poetic gift with his right hand, the musical with his left, to two persons so widely apart that up to this hour we are still waiting for the man who will create a genuine opera by writing both its text and its music."

PERHAPS there is not, in the whole history of the fine arts, a more curious coincidence than is contained in the fact that the foregoing sentence was penned by the eminent German novelist Jean Paul, not only in the same year that Richard Wagner was born, but in the same quiet town of Bayreuth, where, sixty-three years later, the ideal of a musico-dramatic art in which poem and music are of equal value, was first revealed in the Wagner Theatre, specially built for the purpose.

Jean Paul was by no means the only German author, nor the first one, who longed for and predicted the appearance of a poet-composer who would destroy the crude mosaic of various arts, known as Italian opera, and create in its place a genuine music-drama in which poetry, action, scene-painting, and music would all be treated with equal artistic care, and combined into a harmonious whole. Almost all the great German poets expressed similar longings. Lessing, who died thirty-two years before Wagner was born, wrote that "the affinity between poetry and music is so great that Nature herself seems to have destined them, not so much for a

combination as for *one and the same art.* There was indeed a time when the two were united as one art. I do not care to assert that the process of their separation was not a natural one, still less to censure the special cultivation of one or the other separate art; but I may be permitted to express my regrets that, in consequence of this separation, a union of the two arts is hardly ever thought of; or, if thought of, one of them is made a mere handmaid of the other, so that we have no such thing as a simultaneous effect produced by the two arts in equal proportions."

Herder, who died ten years before Wagner was born, expressed his belief in the advent of a composer who would annihilate the old operatic kling-klang and "erect an Odeon, a coherent lyric structure in which poetry, music, action, and scenery would be one and united." Wieland, in 1775, hailed Gluck as a reformer of the opera, but added that others like him would be needed before the sirens could be banished from the stage and the muses restored. "Enough that he has shown us what music could do if, in these days, there were, somewhere in Europe, an Athens, and in this Athens there appeared a Pericles who would do for the opera (*Singspiel*) what that statesman did for the tragedy of Sophocles and Euripides."

Substitute for "Athens" Bayreuth, and for "Pericles" King Ludwig II. of Bavaria, and we have here another historic anticipation as striking as Jean Paul's. To cite only one more poet, Schiller, who died eight years before Wagner was born, wrote: "I always had a certain faith in the opera, believing that from it, as formerly from the choruses of the ancient Bacchus festivals, the tragedy

might be evolved in a nobler form." Could Schiller have lived to hear the *Götterdämmerung*, the most powerful tragedy since *Hamlet* and *King Lear* were written, he would have undoubtedly confessed that his confidence in the opera had not been misplaced.

It is certainly a most significant fact that five of the most eminent literary men of Germany,— Schiller, Lessing, Herder, Wieland, and Jean Paul,— two of whom are Germany's greatest dramatic poets, should have indorsed Wagner's ideal of a music-drama by anticipation. And if it was the *literary* geniuses who first broached the plan of a perfect music-drama, in which poetry should no longer be the handmaid of music but its equal, it was the *musical* geniuses among Wagner's contemporaries — Spohr, Liszt, Bülow, Raff, Cornelius, Tausig, Robert Franz — who first saw that he had realized that ideal in his operas: a fresh confirmation of the dictum that it takes genius to appreciate genius — at least on its first appearance. The professional musicians and critics, on the other hand, fought tooth and nail against Wagner's attempt to expel the sirens from the stage and to restore the muses. He was attacked, lied about, vilified, with a fury and persistence that seem almost incredible to-day, even to those of us who have lived through part of this Forty Years' War. Ignorance, love of routine, fanaticism, chauvinism, race hatred, pedantry, and philistinism united in waging a war against one man such as no other man outside of politics and religion has ever been confronted with. The books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles that served as ammunition on both sides would fill the largest building in the land; and how bitter the feeling has been, future generations will be able to

understand when they read that in German society, for many years, it was considered bad form to speak of Wagner, because of the violent conversational collisions sure to follow; and that a club in New York gave a semi-humorous point to the matter by posting a placard announcing as forbidden topics of discussion, "Religion, Politics, and Wagner." It is this Forty Years' War of Genius against Philistinism that will form the plot of the romantic story of Wagner's life.

A THEATRICAL FAMILY

THAT very prevalent form of human vanity which bases a family's claim to aristocratic distinction on the fact that its ancestors can be traced back several generations, ought to receive a rude shock from the discovery that in the case of the greatest men of genius — who form the only true aristocracy — the pedigree is almost always unknown. Richard Wagner forms no exception to this rule. His industrious German biographers have not yet succeeded in tracing his genealogy farther back than to his grandfather, Gottlob Friedrich Wagner, who was only a humble custom-house official in Leipzig, where he had to see that nothing was smuggled through the city gates. His son Friedrich (Richard Wagner's father, who was born in the same year as Beethoven — 1770) rose somewhat higher in the social scale. He began as clerk in the city courts, but on account of his superior intelligence and knowledge of French he was, during the French occupation of Leipzig, entrusted with the task of reorganizing the police system, and appointed chief of police by Marshal Davoust.

It is possible that Richard Wagner may have inh some of his pugnacious disposition from his occupation. One thing he certainly did inherit him, and that is his love of the theatre — a trait v characterized almost all the members of th

family (both in the ascending and the descending scale) of whom any record has been preserved. Nor was it merely a fondness for theatrical performances, but a special talent for taking part in them. To cite a few instances: Richard's father had the privilege of being one of those who witnessed the first performance in Leipzig of Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans*, in the poet's presence; and he also appeared occasionally as an amateur actor before an audience including royal spectators. Then there was Richard's uncle, Adolf Wagner, who does not appear to have acted, but who manifested his interest in the theatre in the higher sphere of playwright and otherwise. His first printed essay was on the *Alcestis* of Euripides, which was followed by a satiric comedy of his own, numerous translations, a contribution to the history of the theatre, an essay on the theory of the comic, etc.; and what is of special interest with reference to his nephew's later aspirations, is the fact, exhumed by Herr Glasenapp, that in 1806 he arranged a careful performance, on the amateur stage, of Apel's *Polyidos* after the manner of the antique tragedy, superintending all the details personally.[1]

Of Richard's three brothers and four sisters, several distinguished themselves in connection with the stage. Albert, who was born fourteen years before Richard, acquired fame as vocalist, actor, and stage-manager. When he was leading tenor at Breslau, a critic wrote: "His method is good, his trill beautiful, his voice powerful, although somewhat affected by the climate." Rich-

[1] Lists of Adolf Wagner's writings and translations may be found in Oesterlein's *Wagner Katalog*, III. 438–9, and in Glasenapp's biographic sketch of Richard's uncle, in the *Bayreuther Blätter*, 1885, pp. 197–223.

ard's oldest sister, Rosalie, was specially educated for the stage; she became a leading actress at the Leipzig theatre, and in some rôles was preferred even to the famous Schroeder-Devrient, to whom Richard owed so much of his inspiration, as we shall see later on. The eminent critic, H. Laube, wrote that he had never seen Goethe's Gretchen enacted with such deep feeling as by Rosalie Wagner: —

— "For the first time the expression of Gretchen's madness thrilled me to the marrow, and I soon discovered the reason. Most actresses exaggerate the madness into unnatural pathos; they declaim in a hollow ghostly voice. Demoiselle Wagner used the same voice with which she had shortly before uttered her thoughts of love; this gruesome contrast produced the greatest effect."

The critic who wrote these lines was also one of the earliest to discover the dramatic genius of Wagner in his first creative period. The two parted company when Wagner produced those later music-dramas on which his claims to immortality chiefly rest; yet the world will always be indebted to Heinrich Laube for the existence of the charmingly simple and partly ironic autobiography which takes up the first twenty pages of the first volume of Wagner's Collected Writings. It covers the first twenty-nine years of his life, and the circumstances under which it was written are of interest. Laube, who was about to assume editorial control of the *Zeitung für die Elegante Welt*, wrote to Wagner for a sketch of his life which might be elaborated into a biographic article. Wagner complied, but when Laube received his manuscript, he decided to print it as it was, remarking, in a prefatory notice, that he had expected a sketch only: "but the Paris experiences have made of the musician

an author too: I should only spoil the biographic sketch, were I to make any alterations." He was right, and this sketch [1] remains to the present day one of the few reliable sources of information regarding Wagner's childhood.

Besides Rosalie, Richard's sister Luise appeared as an actress, and Klara was educated to appear in Italian opera, but subsequently married a member of the Brockhaus family, of encyclopædia fame. To this list of theatrical sisters, brother, uncle, and father, must be added two nieces, Albert's daughters, Johanna and Franzisca, the former of whom was one of the most famous dramatic singers of her time. She was the first to sing the part of Elizabeth in *Tannhäuser*, and at the end of her brilliant career was offered the Professorship of Dramatic Singing in the Royal School of Music at Munich, which she accepted, "in the hope of training young artists in the spirit and traditions of her uncle, to be worthy interpreters of his works." [2]

Not content with thus diffusing a theatrical spirit throughout the Wagner family, the Fates ordained that Richard should, before he reached his third birthday, receive a stepfather who was a noted professional actor — Ludwig Geyer. After appearing with success in various German cities, Geyer received an appointment at the Dresden theatre, with a salary of 1040 thaler, and the obligation to appear only once or twice a week; which left him plenty of time for his other occupations, of which more will be said presently. The critics especially

[1] An English translation of it will be found in Burlingame's *Wagner's Art Life and Theories*, and a French version in Benoit's *R. Wagner Souvenirs*.

[2] Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, IV. 346.

emphasized his versatility as an actor; and the attitude of the audiences is shown by the fact that once, on his return to the Leipzig theatre, he was applauded so rapturously that he dropped his rôle for a moment and made a speech of thanks — an inartistic proceeding which gave rise to sarcastic comment, and which he himself deeply regretted afterwards.

RICHARD WAGNER'S CHILDHOOD

THE house in which Richard Wagner was born, in Leipzig, does not exist any more. It was located in the Brühl, Number 88, but was found unsafe, in 1885, and torn down. The building which has been erected in its place bears a tablet (visible from the courtyard) with the information that Richard Wagner was born there on May 22, 1813. The time of his birth was one of great importance in the military history of Germany, and lovers of coincidence will find satisfaction in the circumstance that the composer who was destined to free German music from foreign influences and establish a national art, was born at the same time and in the same city of Leipzig, where the great battles were fought which at last freed Germany from the French invaders. But the Wagner family had to pay dearly for this victory. The consequence of the great carnage in the battle-field of Leipzig was an epidemic fever which carried off many victims, among them Friedrich Wagner, on the very day when his little son Richard completed the first half-year of his life. In the following month his brother Albert also had an attack of typhoid fever, and even Richard appears to have had symptoms; his health was so poor as to worry his mother, and remained in an unsatisfactory condition until he reached his fourth birthday.

A VERSATILE STEPFATHER

Poor widow Wagner was left in a sorry predicament, with a numerous progeny and nothing to support them but a small pension from the government. Under these circumstances she can hardly be blamed for not observing the customary year of mourning. Men who are willing to marry a widow with seven children, the oldest of whom is only fourteen, are not over-abundant; and the impecunious widow, solicitous for the welfare of her children, therefore acted wisely in marrying, though only about nine months had elapsed since her husband's death, an old friend of the family who was willing to take upon himself such a burden for the love he bore the widow.[1] This act in itself affords the best possible testimony regarding the character and the attractiveness of Richard's mother, concerning whom otherwise little is known. Her brightness and amiability appear to have made her especially congenial to artists, and among those who occasionally dropped in for a friendly chat with her was not less a personage than Weber, the creator of the opera (*Der Freischütz*) which first aroused young Richard's musical instincts.

Throughout his life Richard Wagner referred to his mother as *mein liebes Mütterchen* (my dear little mother), and at the age of forty-three he told his friend Praeger[2]

[1] Glasenapp, in his biography of Wagner (1882, I. p. 12), states that Geyer married the widow Wagner two years after her husband's death; but in the *Wagner Jahrbuch* (1886, p. 45) he gives more precise data, which lead to the conclusion here adopted. Nine months after Frau Wagner's second marriage, Cäcilie Geyer was born, who subsequently married Eduard Avenarius, to whose son we are indebted for some reminiscences of Richard's childhood.

[2] *Wagner as I Knew Him*, London, 1892, p. 12.

that he could not then see a lighted Christmas tree without thinking of the kind woman, nor prevent the tears starting to his eyes when he thought of the unceasing activity of that little creature for the comfort and welfare of her children. Praeger is doubtless right in suggesting that the exquisitely tender strains in *Siegfried* with which the orchestra accompanies the references to Siegfried's mother, symbolize Wagner's love for his own mother.

"I verily believe," he says, "that Richard Wagner never loved any one so deeply as his *liebes Mütterchen*. All his references to her of his childhood period were of affection, amounting almost to idolatry. With that instinctive power of unreasoned yet unerring perception possessed by women, she from his childhood felt the gigantic brain power of the boy, and his love for her was not unmixed with gratitude for her tacit acknowledgment of his genius."

Ludwig Geyer, who married this widow with seven children, was, as already stated, a distinguished actor. But acting was by no means his only accomplishment; indeed, his gifts appear to have been almost as varied as those of his talented stepson Richard. He wrote a number of comedies, the best of which, *Der Bethlehemitische Kindermord*, exists in four editions and was often played.[1] Geyer's third gift, which seems to have almost amounted to genius, was his skill as a portrait-painter. He was indeed a painter before he became an actor, and retained the pencil even after he had gone on the stage. The critics noted the influence of the actor on the painter in teaching him to seize on those peculiarities of facial expression of the emotions which, through constant

[1] In 1873 a performance of it was given at Bayreuth, on the sixtieth birthday of Wagner, who was greatly pleased by this opportunity to renew the impressions of his youth.

repetition, become fixed, and thus constitute physiognomic individuality. He had the honor of being asked to paint the portraits of the King and Queen of Saxony, and on one of his theatrical visits to Munich he painted many members of the highest aristocratic and military circles.

WEBER IN DRESDEN

But it is the fourth accomplishment of the versatile Geyer that chiefly interests the admirers of Wagner, because it is connected with the real beginnings of German opera in Germany. Besides being an actor, a playwright, and portrait-painter, Geyer was also a tenor, and he had the honor of appearing as such in *Joseph in Egypt*, the first performance given under Weber's direction after his appointment as conductor at the Dresden Opera. Previous to Weber's advent in Dresden the opera there had been exclusively Italian, and even when a German opera was given, it had to be first translated into Italian. In 1815 Count Vitzthum induced the King to found a German opera as a sister institution to the Italian, and Weber was chosen to superintend it. The Italians, who had previously monopolized affairs, became jealous at this, and a series of ignoble intrigues commenced, in which the court and the press were not on the side of the honest German composer, but of the insolent, proud foreigners. Weber was attacked with very much the same weapons which were used subsequently to harass and torture Wagner all his life. Fortunately Weber, without being as pugnacious as Wagner, possessed the same iron will and conscientious devotion to what he considered his duties towards his art and his ideals. When

an attempt was made to give him merely the title of *Musikdirector* instead of *Capellmeister*, which would have ranked him lower than Morlacchi, the conductor of the Italian opera, he replied: —

"I do not demand any more than what was offered me, and what I accepted; but I cannot allow any deviations, and least of all allow myself to be placed under Morlacchi. German and Italian art must have equal rights, for I do not desire, either, to be placed above him. The world will doubtless decide which of us is the first."

The Italian company, however, had the best singers, and Weber, to complete his casts, was obliged to call upon the local actors and actresses. It was thus that Geyer, the actor, came to be a member of the first German Opera in Dresden; and the fact is suggestive and prophetic, as it were; for it was Richard Wagner's cardinal maxim that operas should be above all things *dramas*, and operatic singers, *actors*.

One more utterance of Weber's may be appropriately quoted here, because it shows how similar his views were to Wagner's, and confirms the truthfulness of Cornelius's fine saying that "Weber was a genius who died of the longing to become Wagner." Wagner is rooted in Weber, in his music as in his ideals (a point which will be dwelt on at length in a future chapter), and the following words, written by Weber when he first tried to establish German opera in Dresden, are strikingly similar to those which Wagner uttered more than half a century later, at Bayreuth: —

"The Italians and the French have fashioned for themselves a distinct form of opera, with a framework which allows them to move with ease and freedom. Not so the Germans. Eager in the pursuit of knowledge, and constantly yearning after progress,

they endeavor to appropriate anything which they see to be good in others. But they take it all so much more seriously. With the rest of the world the gratification of the senses is the main object; the German wants a work of art complete in itself, with each part rounded off and compacted into a perfect whole. For him, therefore, a fine *ensemble* is the prime necessity."

FIRST MUSICAL IMPRESSIONS

There can be no doubt that Weber's opportune arrival in Dresden to found a German Opera had much influence in moulding the musical taste and inclinations of young Richard Wagner. His mother's marriage to Geyer, who was at that time a member of the Court Theatre, of course caused the family to remove to that city, where Richard had frequent opportunity to see Weber and hear his music. As he himself tells us in his autobiographic sketch: —

"Nothing gave me so much pleasure as the *Freischütz;* I often saw Weber pass by our house when he came from rehearsals; I always looked upon him with a holy awe. A family tutor, who explained Cornelius Nepos to me, also gave me lessons on the piano; hardly had I got beyond the first five-finger exercises when I secretly learned, all by myself, and at first without a score, the *Freischütz* overture; my teacher surprised me at it one day and said that I would never amount to anything. He was right: I never did learn to play the piano."

"At this period," he adds, "I only played for myself; overtures were my favorites, and I played them with the most atrocious fingering. I could not play a scale correctly, and I conceived a great aversion to all rapid passages. Of Mozart I liked only the overture to the *Magic Flute; Don Juan* I disliked because it was composed to an Italian text, which seemed to me so silly."

Another straw that showed which way the wind was blowing.

In the meantime Geyer also had died, when Richard was only eight[1] years old.

"Shortly before his death," Wagner writes, "I had learned to play on the piano 'Ueb' immer Treu' und Redlichkeit' and the 'Jungfern-Kranz' [from the *Freischütz*], then quite new. The day before his death I had to play these two pieces for him in the adjoining room, and I heard him say to my mother, in a faint voice, 'Could he perhaps have talent for music?' The following morning, after his death, mother came into the room where her children were assembled, and spoke a few words to each of us; and to me she said: 'Of you he wanted to make something.' I remember," Wagner adds, "that for a long time I imagined that I would become somebody."

The mother, too, appears to have been of that opinion, for Laube relates in his *Reminiscences* that he used to visit her, and that she repeatedly asked him, "Do you think that Richard will make his mark?"

RICHARD NOT A PRODIGY — AND WHY

Most of the great composers have manifested their special talent at so early an age that they may be classed as musical prodigies. Wagner, by his own confession, was not a prodigy; and when his operas began to make their way in the world, in spite of the unprecedented opposition of critics and other philistines, his opponents frequently brought forward this fact to prove that he could not be considered a genius. They forgot that most prodigies are doomed to early oblivion; that Beethoven found his first music lessons as irksome as Wagner did, and even shed tears over them; and that Weber, in his

[1] Wagner, in his autobiographic sketch, says seven; but that is a slip of memory, as Geyer died on Sept. 30, 1821.

eighth year, was accosted by his teacher in almost the same words that Wagner's teacher used: "Karl, you may become anything else in the world, but a musician you will never be." But it is hardly worth while to take the argument of Wagner's opponents seriously. Modern science has shown that the higher an organism, the longer it requires to reach maturity, as we see, for example, by comparing man with lower animals. The fact that Wagner's genius matured slowly might therefore be looked on as a presumption in his favor, rather than otherwise.

The principal reason why Wagner did not astonish the natives by his feats as a wonder child is that his mental powers were not focused into one gift or talent, as is the case of most musicians, but that he was, in childhood as in manhood, many-gifted, like his stepfather. Geyer evidently felt that there was something in Richard, as the deathbed anecdote just related shows; but he could not quite make up his mind as to what it was. He first intended to make a painter of him; "but I was very awkward in drawing," Wagner writes in his autobiographic sketch; and to Herr Glasenapp[1] he remarked, in 1876: "I wanted to paint big pictures, like the life-size portrait of the King of Saxony in my stepfather's atelier; instead of that, I was always made to draw eyes only, which I did not like." It is more than probable, however, that if Geyer had lived and Wagner had overcome his aversion to technical drudgery and persevered in this art, he would have distinguished himself in it ultimately, to judge by the wonderful pictorial imaginativeness shown in the scenery of his operas, which com-

[1] *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886, p. 61.

pelled even his fiercest opponent, Dr. Hanslick, to remark that

"It is especially the pictorial sense of Wagner that is at work incessantly in the *Nibelung's Ring;* it appears to have furnished the first impulse for many of the scenes. In looking at the photographs of Joseph Hoffmann's poetically conceived decorations, the thought involuntarily occurs that such pictures may have arisen first in Wagner's imagination and brought forth corresponding music."

The first scene in *Rheingold,* where we see the three Rhine daughters swimming about under the water, a section of which occupies the whole stage to the top, and appears to flow on steadily; the wild mounted maidens in the *Walküre,* riding among the clouds, and alighting on precipitous rocks, filling the air with their weird song; the forest scene in *Siegfried,* where the hero lies under a large tree with spreading branches, and listens to the song of the birds and the rustling of the leaves, so beautifully imitated by the orchestra; the final scene of the *Götterdämmerung,* where the river begins to rise and inundate the ruins of the hall, bearing on its swelling waves the Rhine daughters once more, and accompanied by the surging sounds of the symphonic flood; the magnificent ecclesiastic scenes in *Parsifal,* which are like pictures of the old Italian masters brought to life,—these and other scenic conceptions bear witness to Wagner's pictorial genius; for all of them are described in detail in his poems, and still more minutely in the orchestral score, leaving the scene-painter no further task than the execution of his minute directions.

Another branch of mental activity in which Richard Wagner might have won distinction had he devoted

himself to it, is classical philology. At the age of nine he was placed in the Kreuzschule at Dresden, where he remained till he was fourteen. Latin did not interest him very much, but for Greek literature, history, and mythology he had an ardent enthusiasm which culminated in the translation, at the age of thirteen, of the first twelve books of Homer's *Odyssey* — a self-imposed task which naturally pleased his instructors very much. At the age of fifteen the Wagner-Geyer family moved back to Leipzig, and Richard was placed in the Nikolaischule, the teachers in which appear to have been of inferior calibre to those in Dresden, since they did not succeed in fanning his ardor for classical study as his former teachers had done. Richard was, moreover, subjected to the indignity of being placed in a lower class than the one he had been in at Dresden; and this hurt his feelings so much that he became careless and neglected his studies.

It is an odd circumstance that for the first fifteen years of his life Richard *Wagner* did not exist — officially at least, for he was entered at the Dresden Kreuzschule as Richard *Geyer*, and it is not likely that this name was changed till he left that school, in 1827.

Richard's *poetic* talent manifested itself at the early age of eleven. "One of our classmates had died," he writes, "and the teachers imposed on us the task of writing a poem on his death; the best was to be printed; it was my own, but only after I had pruned it of its excessive verbiage." This success appears to have inspired him with the ambition to become a poet. He attempted some dramas after the Greek type, and also began to study English, for the sole purpose of being able to read Shakespeare in the original: —

"I made a metric translation of Romeo's monologue," he says. "The study of English was also soon abandoned; but Shakespeare remained my model; I projected a grand drama, a sort of compound of *Hamlet* and *King Lear;* the plan was extremely grandiose: forty-two persons died in course of the piece, and in developing the plot I found myself compelled to make most of them reappear as ghosts, because otherwise there would have been no personages left for the last acts."

This drama occupied him two years (14–16); and he adds that at the time when he lost his interest in classical philology it was the only thing that he was devoted to.

A few years ago Wagner's nephew Ferdinand Avenarius published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* of Munich a few new details regarding this wonderful tragedy, which he obtained from his mother (Wagner's youngest sister, Cäcilie Geyer). It seems that Cäcilie was initiated into the secret of the tragedy before the others, who were to be surprised by its grandeur on its completion. Work on the tragedy was frequently interrupted, and prospered most when Richard's mother was ill in bed, on which occasions Richard used to shirk school and lock himself up in his room, where he was heard declaiming wildly.

"One demoniac passage," writes Avenarius, "my mother remembers distinctly. A living person walks up to a ghost, who warns him back with the words, 'Touch me not, for my nose will crumble to dust on contact.' My mother says that this passage did not produce the intended effect on her even at her age, and it seems that Richard himself soon began to doubt the tragic value of his drama, although he long continued his work on it. A friend of my uncle told me that one day when she asked Richard how far he had got with his tragedy, he replied: 'Well, I've got them all dead but one' (Nu, bis auf einen hab' ich sie alle todt)."

BOYHOOD ANECDOTES

The articles of Ferdinand Avenarius contain several other anecdotes of Richard's childhood which invite citation, as they add to our rather scant knowledge of that part of his life. When Weber passed by Richard's window, after a rehearsal at the opera, the boy would call his sister to the window and exclaim, "Look here; that is the greatest man in the world — *how* great he is, you cannot understand." And although Cäcilie could not at first see anything "great" in the crooked-legged little man, with his large spectacles on his large nose, with the gray coat and the vacillating gait, she soon followed her brother's example of looking on him with "religious awe." Richard was very fond of going to the theatre, especially to hear the *Freischütz;* and when permission to go was withheld he found a way to have his will. He stood in a corner and kept count of the passing minutes: "Now they are giving this . . . now that . . . now that . . ." and so on, accompanying this recital with tears and sobs as if his throat were bursting. Finally his mother lost patience — "Away with you, you sniveller," and away he was in a second. Among his early reminiscences is a day when he begged his mother for a penny to buy music paper for copying a piece by Weber.

Never was little Richard more delighted than when his mother took him out for a walk; his love of nature and fresh air showed itself in his earliest years, and his little hand-sled was one of his favorite companions. His first recorded joke is connected with this sleigh. His mother had made a "new" dress for one of his sisters, evidently

out of one of her own old ones. The result was too shiny to suit the girl, but Richard consoled her with the remark: "Never mind, we can go sleighing on that, without getting off." One day Cäcilie accompanied her brother and mother to the river, where they had to wait for the boat. Cäcilie was very fond of going about with bare feet, but on this occasion she missed her shoes and stockings, as the weather turned very cold. "Wait a moment," exclaimed Richard, "I'll give you one of my boots, and the other feet we can keep warm by putting one on the other." This anecdote was subsequently related by Wagner in Paris to the artist Kietz, who made a sketch of this scene, and of others suggested by Wagner's early reminiscences.

The reminiscences of early life always remained remarkably vivid in Wagner's mind, as we are told by Ferdinand Praeger, the first chapters of whose *Wagner as I Knew Him* (1892) are interlarded with several interesting stories of Wagner's boyhood told by himself and previously not placed on record. Richard was nine years old when he slept away from his mother's home for the first time. He was sent on a long visit to his uncle Geyer at Eisleben, the birthplace of Luther, one of the heroes of Wagner's youth. "My family," he remarked to Praeger in 1856, "had been among the staunchest of Lutherans for generations. What attracted me most in the great reformer's character was his dauntless energy and fearlessness. Since then I have often ruminated on the true instinct of children, for I, had I not also to preach a new Gospel of Art? Had I not also to bear every insult in its defence, and had I not too said, 'Here I stand; God help me; I cannot be otherwise'?"

This first journey made a deep impression on the boy, who was born with an instinct for travel: —

"Can one ever forget a first impression? And my first journey was such an event! Why, I seem even to remember the physiognomy of the poor lean horses that drew the jolting 'postkarre.' They were being changed at some intermediate station, the name of which I have now forgotten, when all the passengers had to alight. I stood outside the inn eating the 'butterbrod' with which my dear little mother had provided me, and as the horses were about to be led away I caressed them affectionately for having brought me so far. How every cloud seemed to me different from those of the Dresden sky! How I scrutinized every tree to find some new characteristic! How I looked around in all directions to discover something I had not seen in my short life! How grand I felt when the heavy car rolled into the town of Eisleben!"

The love of animals, and sympathy with their trials, thus evinced at this early age, subsequently became one of Wagner's most marked traits, which he shared with most men of genius. Another trait was that he preferred rambling about the country to learning the rules of grammar, and used to beguile his uncle to tell him stories that he might escape work. During his school days he was frail and small of stature, which served him as an advantage, for the teachers wondered at the unusual energy and intelligence displayed by one of his pigmy frame. With his schoolmates his violent temper brought him into frequent collisions, which, however, rarely degenerated into blows. He was fond of practical jokes, and his superabundant animal spirits gave rise to various escapades. He used to frighten his mother by jumping down stairs and sliding down the banisters, but as he always turned up fresh and smiling, he was allowed to have his way, and was even asked to entertain visitors

with his pranks. The following anecdote, related by Praeger, shows how on one occasion he barely escaped with his life. A holiday had been unexpectedly announced at the Kreuzschule, to the great delight of the boys: —

"Caps were thrown in the air, when Wagner, seizing that of one of his companions, threw it with an unusual effort on to the roof of the school-house, a feat loudly applauded by the rest of the scholars. But there was one dissentient, — the unlucky boy whose cap had been thus ruthlessly snatched. He burst into tears. Wagner could never bear to see any one cry, and with that prompt decision so characteristic of him at all periods of his life, decided at once to mount the roof for the cap. He re-entered the school-house, rushed up the stairs to the cock-loft, climbed out on the roof through a ventilator, and gazed down on the applauding boys. He then set himself to crawl along the steep incline towards the cap. The boys ceased cheering at the sight, and drew back in fear and terror. Some hurriedly ran to the 'custodes.' A ladder was brought and carried up stairs to the loft, the boys eagerly crowding behind. Meanwhile Wagner had secured the cap, safely returned to the opening, and slid back into the dark loft just in time to hear excited talking on the stairs. He hid himself in a corner behind some boxes, waiting for the placing of the ladder, and 'custodes' ascending it, when he came from his hiding-place, and in an innocent tone inquired what they were looking for, — a bird, perhaps? 'Yes, a gallows bird,' was the angry answer of the infuriated 'custodes,' who, after all, were glad to see the boy safe, their general favorite."

We must now return to our narrative, interrupted at the moment when the young poet had killed off all but one of the forty characters in his drama.

RICHARD TURNS TO MUSIC

A very important result followed the writing of this sanguinary and ghostly drama. While he was at work

on it, Richard for the first time became acquainted with the music of Beethoven, at a Gewandhaus concert in Leipzig. It made a deep impression on him, especially the music to Goethe's *Egmont*, which filled him with such great enthusiasm that he made up his mind to embellish his own drama with music of the same style. It did not enter the head of this ambitious youth of sixteen that there would be any special difficulty in carrying out such a project. To familiarize himself with the laws of harmony and counterpoint he borrowed Logier's treatise *for a week* and studied it diligently: "but this study did not bear fruit as fast as I had fancied; its difficulties stimulated and attracted me; *I resolved to become a musician.*"

Thus, although he had had piano lessons previously, and had been deeply impressed by Weber's music in his childhood, it was not till his sixteenth year that Wagner discovered his true vocation. Moreover, he was at first obliged to keep his new resolution to himself, for his family had by this time discovered that he had been neglecting his studies and giving most of his time to his tragedy. To confess the existence of his new hobby would have poured oil on the discontent provoked by this discovery; and Richard therefore composed, in the strictest secrecy, a sonata, a quartet, and an aria. When he had made a little more progress in his new art, he had the courage to tell his family about it; but they only looked on it as a fresh caprice, all the more so as it had not been preceded by careful study or justified by the acquisition of skill in performing on some musical instrument. However, the family humored his whim in so far as to engage a music-teacher, to see whether it had any substantial foundation. The experiment proved unsuc-

cessful. Just as, in his childhood, he had preferred *playing* overtures to five-finger exercises, so now, in his youth, he disgusted his teacher by neglecting his elementary studies in counterpoint and *composing* overtures for grand orchestra.

Obviously there was a certain American trait in the make-up of young Richard Wagner's character: nothing but the biggest of its kind would satisfy him. We have seen how, at the age of five, instead of learning to draw eyes, he wanted to begin by painting life-size portraits of kings; how, at thirteen, he took upon himself, voluntarily, the Herculean task of translating Homer's *Odyssey*, and accomplished half of it; how, at fourteen, he began a tragedy which was to combine the grandeur of two of Shakespeare's dramas. And now, at sixteen, we find him again, trying his new-fledged musical wings by soaring at once to the highest peaks of orchestral achievement, without wasting any time on the humble foothills. Nor was it enough to write overtures: others had done that; consequently Richard's must be a "new departure." As he himself remarks: "Beethoven's ninth symphony appeared like a simple Pleyel sonata by the side of this marvellously complicated overture" — referring to one of his compositions which was played during an entr'acte at the Leipzig theatre. To facilitate the reading of this astounding score he had conceived the novel idea of writing it in three kinds of ink, red for the strings, green for the wood-wind, and black for the brass instruments. "This overture was the climax of my absurdities," Wagner writes, and he goes on to tell how, at its performance, the public was at first astonished at the perseverance of the drum-player, who had to tap

his instrument *fortissimo* every fourth bar, throughout the piece; how this astonishment gradually changed to open disgust, and ended in an explosion of general hilarity, to the young composer's great discomfiture.

Nevertheless, Wagner adds that this first performance of a piece of his own made a deep impression on him; and Heinrich Dorn, who conducted this overture (and who subsequently assisted Wagner in getting a position at Riga), related in his *Ergebnisse aus Erlebnissen* that "young Richard, at that time a very modest youth, thanked me on the following day, visibly surprised, for having done him this service. I could only assure him that I had easily divined his talent, and that I had been especially pleased on finding that I had to make no corrections at all in the orchestration (as is very apt to be necessary in the case of beginners), and that I expected the best of his future." Dorn also says that at the rehearsal the musicians were convulsed with laughter at this extraordinary piece.

This *fiasco* taught Wagner a useful lesson, and brought him back to his senses. He matriculated at the University of Leipzig, less with the intention of devoting himself to a profession than from a desire to attend lectures on æsthetics and philosophy. The dissipations peculiar to German student life attracted him for a while, and made him neglect all his favorite studies, including music, to the distress of his relatives, who began to feel pretty certain that he was a good-for-nothing, and would never amount to anything. The reaction came soon. The unfettered freedom and gross indulgences of student life filled him with disgust, and at last he made up his mind to devote himself to a careful and systematic study of

music. Previous attempts with a pedantic teacher named Gottlieb Müller had led to no useful results; but this time, as good luck would have it, he fell into the hands of one of Bach's successors as Cantor at the Thomasschule, — Theodor Weinlig, — who possessed the rare gift of making the study of counterpoint as attractive as play. Before the end of six months, Weinlig himself brought these lessons to a close, having found that Wagner could solve the most difficult problems in counterpoint; and he told his pupil in conclusion: "Probably you will never be called upon to write a fugue; but the fact that you can write one will give you technical independence, and make everything else easy."

CONCERT PIECES

About this time Wagner learned to admire Mozart, and he composed a sonata in which he took great pains to be natural and simple. This sonata was published by Breitkopf und Härtel, and although it does not show any traces of Wagner's peculiar style, it is notable as being the first piece of his that ever got into print.[1] To reward the young composer for the fetters placed on him in these pieces Weinlig permitted him to compose something to suit his own taste. The result was a fantasia in F sharp minor for piano, which has never been printed, but which is, according to W. Tappert,[2] much more interesting and individual than the sonata and the

[1] The best movement, the menuet, is obtainable to-day as No. 84 of the *Perles Musicales*. A facsimile of the original title-page is printed in the *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886, p. 366. No. 24 of the *Perles Musicales* is a polonaise of Wagner's, composed, like this sonata, at the age of eighteen.

[2] *Richard Wagner: Sein Leben u. Seine Werke*, 1883, p. 5.

polonaise. Other pieces of this period are a concert overture in D-minor, an overture to Raupach's *König Enzio*, and a concert overture with fugue, in C-major, none of which have been printed. Of the last named Wagner says that "it was composed after the model of Beethoven, whom I now understood somewhat better, and was produced at a Gewandhaus concert, with encouraging success." The *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (1832, p. 296) says of the same piece: —

"Much pleasure was given us by a new overture by a still very young composer, Herr Richard Wagner. The piece was thoroughly appreciated, and, indeed, the young man promises much: the composition not only sounds well, but it has ideas and is written with care and skill, with an evident and successful striving for the noblest. We saw the score."

A performance of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony also led Wagner to write a pastoral play dramatically suggested by Goethe's *Laune der Verliebten*.

Of more importance than these shorter compositions was a symphony in C-minor, which had a most interesting history. After completing it Wagner placed it in his trunk and made a trip to Vienna, "for no other purpose," as he relates, "than to get a glimpse of this famed musical centre. What I heard and saw there was not to my edification; wherever I went I heard *Zampa* or Strauss's potpourris on *Zampa* — two things that were an abomination to me especially at that time. On my return I remained some time in Prague, where I made the acquaintance of Dionys Weber and Tomaschek; the former had some of my compositions played at the Conservatory, among them my symphony."

So much Wagner relates in his *Autobiographic Sketch*

(1843). In a letter to the editor of the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*,[1] written at Venice forty years later and six weeks before his death, he gives further details. Having returned to Leipzig, he naturally desired to have the symphony played at the Gewandhaus. Hofrath Rochlitz, who was at that time the presiding chief, carefully examined the score, and when Wagner called on him personally, he put on his spectacles and exclaimed: "What do I see? Why, you are a very young man indeed; I had expected to see a much older and more experienced composer." This was encouraging, and not long thereafter the symphony was played at the Gewandhaus, and favorably received, all the movements, too, with the exception of the second, being loudly applauded by a large audience.

A few years later Mendelssohn became director of the Gewandhaus concerts.

"Astonished at the excellent achievements of this still so young master," Wagner writes, "I sought his acquaintance, during a later sojourn in Leipzig (1834 or '35), and on this occasion yielded to a strangely inward (innerliche) necessity by giving him — or rather forcing on him — the manuscript of my symphony with the request not at all to examine it, but only to take it under his care. Probably I fancied that perhaps he would take a look at it after all and say something to me about it. But this never happened. In the course of years, my paths often brought me near Mendelssohn again; we met, we dined, we even played together once in Leipzig; he attended the first performance of my *Flying Dutchman* in Berlin, and found that, inasmuch as the opera had after all not proved quite a failure, I ought to be satisfied with my success; on the occasion of a performance of *Tannhäuser* in Dresden he also remarked that a canon in the adagio of the second finale had pleased

[1] Reprinted in Vol. X. of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, pp. 400-406.

him. Only of my symphony, and the manuscript of it, he never said a word, which was reason enough why I never inquired after it."

For almost half a century nothing was known of this manuscript, and Wagner had given it up as lost, when it was discovered in an old trunk in Dresden. The circumstances of this discovery, and of the performance of the symphony in Venice, a few weeks before Wagner's death, may, however, be more fitly and dramatically related in a later chapter.[1] Here we need only add that, according to Wagner's own testimony, clearness and virility were his aim in writing this work, and that, besides Beethoven, Mozart was his prototype. In regard to length, the symphony suggests the former rather than the latter of these composers, for it has been noted that it contains 1836 bars, while Mozart's longest symphony has only half that number. Beethoven's influence is also shown in the structure and in not a few "allusions" of the symphony; for Beethoven was at that time, as during the remainder of his life, his special idol.

WORSHIP OF BEETHOVEN

It was the announcement of the great symphonist's death that had first drawn Wagner's attention to his music. The *Egmont* music inspired him, as we have just seen, with the plan to set his own great ghost tragedy to music; and in the opinion of the composer, Heinrich Dorn (who at that time was a friend of Wagner's, but subsequently became a bitter enemy and rival),

"there was perhaps never at any time a young composer who was more familiar with Beethoven's works than the eighteen-year-old Wagner of that time. He possessed most of the master's over-

[1] See Index, under "Symphony I."

tures in scores copied by his own hand; with the sonatas he went to sleep, with the quartets he got up; the songs he sang, the quartets he whistled (for in his playing there was no progress); in short, it was a true *furor teutonicus*, which, in its union with an intellect of scientific cultivation and unusual activity, promised to yield vigorous shoots."

This was at the age of eighteen, and many years later Wagner proved his unaltered affection for Beethoven by writing his well-known analytical programmes of some of his idol's symphonies or overtures; the special twenty-seven-page article on the performance of the ninth symphony; and that monument of artistic enthusiasm, the essay on Beethoven, which takes up seventy-four pages of the ninth volume of his collected works, and was written at the age of fifty-seven; not to speak of the countless references to Beethoven and his works scattered through his various essays.[1] In Paris, about the time when ***Rienzi*** was completed, he conceived the plan of writing a Beethoven biography, and it was one of Heine's jokes that Wagner always had the words *ami de Beethoven* printed on his visiting-cards.

Two of the earliest extant letters of Wagner's should be alluded to in connection with this topic. The first, dated Oct. 6 (1830), is addressed to the well-known music publishers, B. Schott's Söhne in Mayence, and contains an offer to arrange Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for two hands.

"For a long time," he writes, "I have made Beethoven's magnificent last symphony the object of my profoundest study, and

[1] These, like Wagner's allusions to all other composers, and to his own works, will be found conveniently grouped together in the two volumes of Glasenapp's *Wagner Encyclopädie* (Leipzig, E. W. Fritzsch, 1891).

the more I came to realize the great value of this work, the more it grieved me to know that it is still so imperfectly understood, or altogether ignored, by the greater part of the musical public. To make this work more familiar, the best method seemed to me a serviceable arrangement for the piano, such as, to my great regret, I have never succeeded in finding — for that four-hand arrangement of Czerny's surely can no longer be considered sufficient. My great enthusiasm has thus led me to make an attempt to arrange this symphony for *two hands*, and I have so far succeeded in arranging the first and perhaps most difficult movement in the most accurate and complete manner possible. I therefore venture to approach your respected firm with the question whether you would be inclined to publish such an arrangement (for of course I should not like to continue this difficult work, at present, without this certainty). As soon as I am assured of this, I shall at once go to work and complete what I have begun. Therefore I humbly beg for a speedy answer, and as far as I am concerned you may be assured of the greatest zeal.

"Your Honors'

"My Address: Humble Servant,

Leipzig, im Pichhof vor'm Halli'schen Thor 1 Treppe." RICHARD WAGNER.[1]

This offer was evidently not accepted. Beethoven's last symphony was not appreciated then as it now is (largely owing to Wagner's efforts and influence), nor of course was Wagner's name of any commercial value at that time.[2]

Apparently humbled by his failure, the eighteen-year-old musician wrote another letter on Aug. 6, 1831, to

[1] *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886, p. 476.

[2] What fabulous sums publishers would pay to-day for the manuscript of Beethoven's symphony arranged by Wagner may be inferred from the fact that a concert manager in Berlin a few years ago paid Wagner's heirs 50,000 marks for the privilege of owning, *for one year only*, the exclusive right of permitting performances of Wagner's newly discovered symphony in C !

the Bureau de Musique in Leipzig, in which he offered to make arrangements for the piano at *less than the usual rates*, after convincing the Bureau of his fitness by some trial tasks for which he would ask no compensation: "I am prompted to this request by a lack of occupation, and the wish to find employment in work of this sort."

A SECOND SYMPHONY

It is commonly supposed that Wagner wrote but one symphony; but in 1886 W. Tappert, one of his most intimate friends, who had been given free access to all his papers and music manuscripts, discovered a sketch of a second symphony which was made in August, 1834. The allegro is complete; of the adagio there are twenty-nine bars, ending abruptly. Wagner himself never mentioned this symphony, and seemed to have forgotten it entirely. In this second symphony Herr Tappert discovered traces of Weber's influence, besides Beethoven's; and he adds significantly: —

"We did not even need the wond[redacted]yphonic stage-festival-play *Parsifal* to justify the asse[redacted] that Wagner was the greatest contrapuntist of his time. Only half a year his lessons with Cantor Weinlig continued; what astounding results they had is proved also by the unfinished sketch of the E-major symphony. Ask in our conservatories whether the young men there, after several years' study, can accomplish in free composition what Richard Wagner accomplished at the age of eighteen to twenty-one. And this chosen one was stigmatized by the academic critics and the ignorant laity at their beer-tables as an *amateur!*"[1]

[1] Tappert's article on the E-major symphony, with musical illustrations, will be found in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* for Sept. 30 and Oct. 7, 1886.

THE FIRST OPERAS

I HAVE dwelt somewhat longer on what may be called the concert period of Wagner's life than other biographers, because the facts thus brought together show that, as he had already mastered the technique of symphonic composition before his twentieth year, he might have lived to equal or surpass his greatest predecessors in this field had not fate and his theatrical instincts fortunately urged him into what he felt to be the higher domain of the music-drama. That was his true sphere; he needed a poetic or pictorial idea to evoke a deeply original motive from his creative imagination; and it is for this reason that none of his concert compositions — neither these early ones nor those of a later period — quite equal the best parts of his music dramas, with the exception of the "Siegfried Idyl," in which, however, the chief themes are borrowed from the *Siegfried* drama. In turning, therefore, to the operatic period of his life, we reach at last the real Richard Wagner.

THE WEDDING

In speaking of his visit (in 1832) to Prague, where his symphony in C had its first performance, Wagner adds: —

"I also wrote there a tragic opera-text, *The Wedding*. I do not remember where I found the mediæval subject. An insane lover climbs through the window into the bedroom of his friend's be-

aria of 142 bars, to replace a shorter one of fifty-eight bars in Marschner's *Vampire*.[1]

In his autobiographic sketch, Wagner relates: —

"In this year [1833] I composed a three-act romantic opera, *The Fairies*, for which I had arranged the text myself from Gozzi's *The Serpent-Woman*. Beethoven and Weber were my prototypes: in the ensembles many things were successful; the finale of the second act in particular promised to be very effective. Extracts from this opera given at concerts in Würzburg were received favorably."

Early in 1834 he took his score under his arm, went back to Leipzig, and offered it to the director of the theatre. At that time, however, as we have already seen, Italian and French operas had a monopoly of the German theatres, and native composers had to beg for performances of their works as a special favor. A foreign opera of the same calibre as *The Fairies* might have found favor with the director, but for a product of native talent there was no demand, and so the fairy opera was put aside, and nothing more was done for it during its author's lifetime.

In his *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* (written in 1857 and reprinted in Vol. IV. of the Collected Works, p. 313), Wagner gives some further interesting details regarding *The Fairies*: —

"It was written in imitation of the 'romantic' opera of Weber and also of Marschner, whose works were at that time just coming into notice at Leipzig. . . . What attracted me to Gozzi's fairy-tale was not only its adaptability for operatic purposes, but the

[1] The manuscript of this aria is in possession of W. Tappert of Berlin. A phototype facsimile is appended to his *R. Wagner: Sein Leben und Seine Werke*, and is of interest to those who wish to compare Wagner's earliest musical handwriting with that of his later periods.

subject itself interested me. A fairy who renounces immortality for the possession of a beloved mortal can win the gift of mortality only through certain severe conditions, the non-fulfilment of which on the part of her lover threatens her with dire calamity; the lover succumbs to the trial, which consists in his being called upon not to repel the fairy in whatever (compulsory) cruel form she may appear to him. In Gozzi's tale the fairy is hereupon changed to a snake; the repentant lover restores her to her proper form by kissing the snake: thus winning her as his wife. I altered this plot by having the fairy changed to a stone, from which she is brought back to life by the lover's passionate song, whereupon, instead of the fairy being dismissed with him to the land of mortals, both are welcomed by the Fairy King into the happy world of the immortals."

The Fairies was finished on Dec. 7, 1833, and had its first performance on June 29, 1888, at Munich — fifty-five years after its completion, five years after Wagner's death! The truth is that Wagner was not proud of this opera in later years, and intended that it should never be performed. But when his last music-drama, *Parsifal*, was being prepared for performance at Bayreuth, the necessity of raising funds induced him, in return for the pecuniary and artistic support he received from the King of Bavaria, to grant the Munich Court Theatre the right of performing *Parsifal*, although this ran counter to his pet idea of reserving *Parsifal* exclusively for the festivals at Bayreuth. He found it possible, however, to make an arrangement with the Munich authorities by which they waived their right to deprive Bayreuth of its *Parsifal* monopoly, in return for the permission to produce *The Fairies* at Munich exclusively.[1] The director of the

[1] King Ludwig, however, reserved the right to have *Parsifal* produced in Munich at those not infrequent performances which, at his command, were given with himself as sole spectator. For this purpose

Royal Opera, seeing that *The Fairies* could hardly be expected to attract audiences by the beauty of its music and its poetry, like its author's later operas, wisely concluded to bring it out in a most gorgeous but thoroughly artistic scenic attire. This, combined with the curiosity to hear the first effort of the most popular operatic composer of the century, made *The Fairies* a quite unexpected success. It had a "run" almost like an operetta during the first season, and is now still played quite frequently, especially during the tourist season, when many of the Bayreuth pilgrims visit Munich.

The text-book of *The Fairies* has few of those poetic lines which abound in its author's later dramas, although there are some passages and situations quite worthy of the author of *Lohengrin* and *Siegfried*. The scenic arrangements already bear witness to Wagner's pictorial fancy, and the choice of a mythical subject is significant of a composer who based ten of his thirteen operas on legendary and supernatural stories. Musically, the most striking trait of this opera is, as the composer himself intimates, its imitation of Beethoven, Weber, and Marschner; he might have added Mozart, for there are as distinct "allusions" to *Don Juan* and the *Magic Flute*, as there are to *Fidelio*, *Euryanthe*, and *Oberon*. There are also a few germs of ideas which he developed in his

a new *mise-en-scène* was provided, as sumptuous as that in Bayreuth. The eminent Wagnerian tenor, Heinrich Vogl, who took part in all these private *Parsifal* performances, told me that eight of them were given altogether, the King's appetite for Wagner's music being insatiable up to the end of his life. To the King's subjects it must have been a consideration as tantalizing as it was romantic and unique, that Wagner's last, and in some respects grandest, work was being given over and over again in their Court Theatre, and no one permitted to hear it but their monarch.

later operas (especially *Rienzi* and the *Flying Dutchman*) and in the *Faust* overture. There is also that peculiar bombastic striving for exaggerated expression which characterizes much of the *Rienzi* music; but of the melodic beauty, harmonic originality, and varied orchestral coloring of his later works there are but few traces, while on the other hand the management of the orchestra, alone or in combination with the chorus, already shows much of that ingenuity which enabled him subsequently to write those magnificent ensembles in *Lohengrin* and the *Meistersinger*.[1]

AT MAGDEBURG. — A STEP BACKWARD

Not only was Wagner's creative genius slow in developing, but in the period we have now arrived at he actually made a step backward, gave up the serious musical ideals which Weber and Beethoven had taught before him, and began to flirt with the coquettish, seductive operatic muse of the period, who promised him success and luxury if he would throw himself into her arms. He had accepted an appointment, in 1834, as musical director of the opera at Magdeburg, where he had an opportunity to become thoroughly familiar with all the trivial operatic melodies of the time. "The

[1] More detailed accounts of the performance of *The Fairies* in Munich may be found in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, July 19 and Aug. 1, 1888, and in Mr. L. C. Elson's *European Reminiscences* (Chicago, 1891, pp. 99–102). Mr. Elson found it strange to hear "the conventional aria, scena, cavatina, prayer, and mad scene in a Wagnerian work. The opera throughout," he says, "crushes the critics who have maintained that Wagner was by nature incapable of composing tunes. . . . It is one of the 'ifs' of musical history whether Wagner could not have composed comic opera, in the French sense, had he practised more in this vein. Thank Heaven, he did not!"

rehearsing and conducting of these light-jointed fashionable French operas, the cleverness and brilliancy of their orchestral effects," he writes (IV. 316), "often gave me a childish sort of pleasure when I could let these things loose, right and left, from my conductor's desk." His artistic conscience was demoralized by seeing what enthusiasm this trivial sort of music produced. Why not write similar things and become the man of the hour? His score of *The Fairies* became a matter of indifference to him, and he no longer thought of getting it performed. It was too serious, and of too elevated a character to suit his new mood; and he now began to meditate on a very different sort of opera, concerning which he says: —

> "A strange demoralization of my taste had resulted from my connection (during two winters at Magdeburg) with German operatic affairs, and this demoralization was manifested in the whole conception and execution of my new opera in such a way that surely no one could have recognized from this score the youthful Beethoven-and-Weber enthusiast."

This "demoralization" affected not only his artistic conscience, but his general views of life. He had, through books and personal intercourse, come under the influence of a class of revolutionary writers, who attacked social hypocrisy and preached doctrines that smacked of anarchy and free love. It was in this mood that he wrote his new opera, *The Novice of Palermo*, of which he has himself[1] given a most interesting and amusing account.

[1] *Das Liebesverbot; Gessammelte Schriften*, Vol. I. pp. 27–40. English version in Burlingame's *Art Life and Theories of Wagner*, pp. 27–40.

THE NOVICE OF PALERMO

"One fine morning I stole away from my surroundings, to take a solitary breakfast on the Schlackenburg, and at the same time to sketch a new opera-poem in my notebook. I had chosen for this the subject of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, which I now, in harmony with my present mood, transformed in a very free manner into an opera-book to which I gave the title *Das Liebesverbot* [the Love-Veto]. The ideas of 'Young Europe' that were in the air at that time, combined with the reading of [Heinse's] *Ardinghello*, and intensified by the peculiar mood which my operatic experiences had put me into, supplied the keynote for my production, which was especially aimed against Puritan hypocrisy, and thus led to the bold glorification of 'unchecked sensuality.' I took great pains to look at the serious Shakespearian subject only from this point of view; I saw only the sinister, severe governor, himself burning with a violent passion for the young novice, who, while imploring him for the pardon of her brother who is condemned to death for an amorous intrigue, has through the contagiousness of her warm human feelings aroused in the stern Puritan a consuming flame. That these powerful motives are in Shakespeare's piece so richly developed merely in order to be found the more weighty at last in the scales of justice, I did not at all care to notice; what I was concerned about, was to expose the sinfulness of hypocrisy and the unnaturalness of moral prudery. Consequently I dropped the *Measure for Measure* entirely, and made avenging love alone inflict punishment on the hypocrite. I transferred the scene from the fabulous Vienna to the capital of glowing Sicily, in which a German governor, disgusted with the incredibly easy morals of the population, attempts to carry out a Puritan reform, in which he miserably fails."

To this brief sketch Wagner adds a long and detailed analysis of the plot, which it is hardly worth while to follow here, as the opera will in all probability never be revived. Its single performance at Magdeburg, how-

ever, took place under circumstances so extraordinary that they must be briefly related.

The city of Magdeburg, where Wagner composed his *Novice of Palermo* and conducted the Opera two winter seasons, is to-day one of the most flourishing commercial cities in Germany, with a fortress of the first rank and a population of 160,000. In 1836, however, it had only 40,000, and the business men and soldiers who made up its population do not appear to have cared much for opera. This we learn from a correspondent of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, who exclaims: "What more do you want than the assurance that we have had a better opera this winter than ever before? What do you say if I add that everybody admitted this, and yet no one went to the opera, and that the house had to be closed before the winter season was over?" He then goes on to describe the singers, and continues: —

"If you add to all this that a young, clever artist, like Musik-director Richard Wagner, succeeded with ardor and skill in creating an excellent ensemble, it was inevitable that we should have had some great artistic treats." Yet the philistines neglected the opera, and "I can see in the case of Wagner and persons like him and myself, what a torture it is to have to live in such a commercial and military city while all one's nerves and fibres crave for activity."

It was under such discouraging circumstances that Wagner was doomed to bring out for the first time in his life an opera of his own composition. In return for some travelling expenses incurred by him in an official capacity he was entitled to a benefit performance. He naturally seized on this opportunity to produce his new opera. This involved a considerable outlay for scenery and rehearsals, and as he did not wish to load this on the

management, which was already on the point of bankruptcy, he agreed to give two performances, and to reserve for himself the profits of the second only. It was near the end of the season, but this did not seem a disadvantage, as the last performances of the season were usually better attended than the preceding ones. Unfortunately, some of the singers, whose salary was in arrears, handed in their resignation, and it was only owing to Wagner's personal popularity with them that he succeeded in retaining them a little longer. Ten days only were available for rehearsing an opera of great dimensions and with many difficult ensemble numbers. To continue in Wagner's own words: —

"I relied, however, on the success of special efforts to which, for my sake, the singers willingly submitted, studying their parts day and night; and as, in spite of this, it was simply impossible to establish any certainty of execution and memory on the part of the hard-worked artists, I finally counted on a miracle to be worked through the skill in conducting which I had already acquired. What a peculiar faculty I did possess for helping the singers, and for keeping up a certain apparent smoothness of movement notwithstanding their uncertainty, was actually shown at the few rehearsals with orchestra, where I succeeded, by means of constant prompting, singing along loudly, and giving directions concerning the acting, in keeping the whole so far in order that one was justified in hoping that the result might be quite tolerable."

In making these calculations he forgot that a performance is a different matter from a rehearsal; for when the house was filled with spectators the conductor could not sing along and give loud hints as before; the consequence being an utterly chaotic representation which must have bewildered the audience all the more as no

librettos had been printed to explain the plot. No wonder that, at the second performance, fifteen minutes before the rising of the curtain, the composer saw no one in the parquet but his housewife and her husband, and a Polish Jew in full costume. He hoped for a few more spectators, but the curtain was fated never to rise again on his opera. A quarrel, prompted by jealousy, broke out among the singers behind the scenes and reached such dimensions that the stage manager had to come before the curtain and announce that no performance would take place, on account of "unforeseen impediments." Thus ended the season, and Wagner's opera.

Not that he gave it up at once in consequence of this mishap, which could hardly be called a fiasco, as the opera had really had "no show" at all. The correspondent above referred to concludes his notice of the new opera with these words: "This much I know, that the work will succeed if the composer can get it performed at a good theatre. There is much in it; everything sounds well; it has music and it has melody, which is pretty far to seek in our German operas of the period." Wagner, too, had faith enough in his opera to offer it to the managers in Leipzig and in Berlin, but without success. Three years later, when he was in Paris, he tried to bring it out at the Théâtre de la Renaissance; its frivolous subject seemed well suited for the French stage. Three numbers had already been translated, so successfully, as Wagner attests, "that my music sounded better to the French words than to the original German text; for it was music such as is most easily understood by the French, and everything promised well when the Théâtre de la Renaissance became bankrupt! All trouble, all

hopes, had therefore been in vain. I now gave up my *Liebesverbot* entirely; I felt that I could not respect myself any longer as its composer." This attitude regarding the *Novice of Palermo* was of course not altered but rather accentuated later in life. In 1866 he dedicated the score to King Ludwig II.[1] with the following lines in which he pronounces it a "sin of his youth," from which he begs the monarch to absolve him by accepting it: —

"Ich irrte einst und möcht'es nun verbüssen:
Wie mach' ich mich der Jugendsünde frei?
Ihr Werk leg'ich demüthig Dir zu Füssen,
Dass Deine Gnade ihm Erlöser sei."

[1] The score of this opera, the performance of which thus had the curious fate of being twice frustrated by the failure of an operatic institution, is preserved at the Munich opera-house. In July, 1891, I visited the eminent Wagnerian tenor, Heinrich Vogl, who, when not employed at the Munich opera-house, lives with his family at a country seat near Tutzing on Lake Starnberg, where he has large grain-fields, fine scenery, including a small private lake, and, as guardian of his house, a large dog named Wotan, a direct descendant of one of Wagner's famous animals. Herr Vogl gave me much valuable information regarding Wagner's life at Munich and his relations with the King, which will be only made use of in its place. Regarding the *Novice of Palermo* he told me an interesting circumstance which, I believe, has never got into print. After the tremendous success of *The Fairies* the thought naturally occurred that Wagner's other juvenile opera might perhaps be revived opportunely. The artists were therefore selected and a rehearsal was held which lasted five hours, and which sealed the fate of *The Novice of Palermo*. "The arias and other numbers," said Herr Vogl, "were such ludicrous and undisguised imitations of Donizetti and other popular composers of that time, that we all burst out laughing and kept up the merriment throughout the rehearsal. I was for giving the opera, in spite of this, as a curiosity, and because it could of course not injure Wagner's reputation; nor was the Intendant quite averse to giving it. Ultimately, however, we all agreed that it would be better to leave it alone, less on account of the music than because of the licentious character of the libretto. So the manuscript was shelved again."

Concerning the music of this opera Wagner himself says, in several places: —

"I had abandoned abstract mysticism and learned to love the material. An attractive subject, wit, and cleverness seemed to me delightful things: as regards my music I found both among the French and Italians. I gave up my prototype Beethoven. . . . At a concert I produced the overture to my *Fairies;* it was very well received. . . . A good impression was made on the public by a New Year's cantata[1] which I had written hastily. Such easy successes confirmed me in the belief that, in order to please, one must not be too scrupulous regarding one's means. In this mood I continued the composition of my *Novice of Palermo.* I did not take the slightest pains to avoid imitating the French and the Italians" — all the less as he had noticed what tremendous effects a great artist like Joan Schroeder-Devrient was capable of producing even in so flimsy a work as Bellini's *Romeo and Juliet.* He mentions Auber, Verdi, and Bellini as among his new models, and concludes that "if any one should compare this score with that of *The Fairies* he would find it difficult to understand how such a complete change in my tendencies could have been brought about in so short a time. A compromise between the two was to be the goal of my further artistic development."

FIRST CRITICAL ESSAY

The sudden change in Wagner's ideals and methods will seem less enigmatic when we bear in mind that he was simply swimming with the musical current, and as a youth of only twenty-two could hardly be expected to have the strength to swim against it, as he did later, beginning with the *Flying Dutchman.* Not he alone but

[1] In this cantata Wagner made use of the andante of his first symphony — one of the very few cases where he followed a device resorted to by Handel and other famous composers, of borrowing from his own earlier works.

the whole German nation turned their backs on Beethoven and Weber, who had just composed their greatest works — *Fidelio* and *Euryanthe* — and listened only to Rossini, Auber, and other Italian and French composers. Wagner himself voiced the opinion of the average opera-goer of that time in his first critical essay, which was printed in the *Zeitung für die Elegante Welt* (June 10, 1834), and which contains opinions regarding vocal music, the opera, and German composers diametrically opposed to his more mature opinions expressed in later years. The essay is too long to reprint here,[1] but the following remarks on Weber's *Euryanthe* may be cited as an example: —

"What petty calculation in its declamation, what timid employment of this or that instrument to enforce the expressiveness of a word! Instead of sketching a situation with a single bold and broad stroke, he breaks up the general impression by minute details and detailed minuteness. How difficult he finds it to give life to his ensembles; how the second finale drags! Here an instrument, there a voice, wants to-day something awfully wise, and ultimately none of them knows what it says. And as the hearers have to confess, at the end, that *they* did not understand anything, they console themselves with the fact that at any rate it must be regarded as very erudite, and therefore worthy of great respect. Oh, this unfortunate *erudition* — this source of all German evils!"

Compare with this the reference to *Euryanthe* in one of his *last* essays (X. 219), and the change in his critical opinions will be found no less pronounced than the growth in his musical and poetic style, from the *Novice of Palermo* to *Siegfried*. "This *Euryanthe*," he exclaims

[1] See the *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886, pp. 377–379.

with an artist's exaggeration, "in which, notwithstanding its reputed tediousness, every single number is worth more than all the opera seria of Italy, France, and *Judœa!*" Yet in spite of this extravagant statement, Wagner retained to the end of his life the conviction that — *in their own way* — the Italians and the French had a more perfect and harmonious operatic style than the Germans, whose opera was too much based on foreign models to be truly national and unique. It was the aim of his life to create a national German opera, as unique as were the Italian and the French styles; and in this he succeeded.

KÖNIGSBERG AND RIGA

THE failure of the Magdeburg opera company once more threw Wagner on his own resources, which were not great; in fact, they were of a *minus* quantity. He had borrowed money right and left (a habit which he kept up from necessity for many years), in the hope and expectation of repaying it from the proceeds of the second performance of his opera at Magdeburg; but as that second performance was never given, he found himself in debt and out of employment at the same time. He made his first visit to Berlin to try to secure a performance of his *Novice of Palermo*, but failed. Then, hearing that the Königsberg Theatre needed a musical director, he went there to apply for the position; but as he could not get a definite answer at once, he wrote to his friend, Heinrich Dorn, to inquire whether he could not secure a place for him.[1] Dorn was not able to do anything, for the time being, but meanwhile the Königsberg position was assigned to Wagner, who took possession of it in January, 1837, after nine months of enforced inactivity.

AN IMPRUDENT MARRIAGE

Two months previously to this event Wagner had taken a step which was to affect his life most seriously for

[1] This letter is printed in Dorn's *Ergebnisse aus Erlebnissen*, 1877, p. 158.

almost twenty-five years. At Magdeburg he had become engaged to an actress named Wilhelmine (or Minna) Planer, and on Nov. 24, 1836, he married her in Königsberg. Now it is not necessary to agree with Bacon and Schopenhauer that men who wish to achieve greatness in literature or art should never marry at all; but this much is certain, that it is very foolish for an ambitious and struggling composer, without a position, and with plenty of debts, to marry at the age of twenty-three as Wagner did (Nov. 24, 1836).[1] He had to suffer many years for this hasty step, and in a poem which he wrote into his diary on Aug. 4, 1840, in Paris, he gives us his own opinion on the matter, somewhat in the style of Heine, extolling the blessing of having a wife, to those who can afford one, but vowing, for his part, that, were he ten years younger, he would act more wisely.[2]

Richard Pohl says, in his short Wagner Biography,[3] of Minna Planer, "the pretty young actress," that "she was a faithful, self-sacrificing wife who bore with him long and devotedly all cares and privations, in Paris even the bitterest poverty. But she was a prosaic, domestic woman who never understood her husband, and who might have been an impediment to his far-reaching ideas, his high-flying plans, if Richard Wagner could have been impeded in his course by anything. The

[1] This recalls the case of Berlioz, who at thirty married Miss Smithson, of whom he says: "On the day of our wedding she had nothing in the world but debts, and the fear of never again being able to appear to advantage on the stage because of her accident; I, for my part, had three hundred francs [$60] that my friend Gounet had lent me, and had quarrelled again with my parents."

[2] The poem may be found in Kürschner's *Wagner Jahrbuch* for 1886, p. 290.

[3] *Sammlung Musikalisher Vorträge*, Nos. 53, 54, p. 141.

natural end was that they separated — many years later, it is true. Twenty-five years these two ill-mated persons lived together and sought to get along with each other."

Another intimate friend of Wagner's, Wilhelm Tappert, remarks [1] that "the Meister himself held the memory of his first wife in great honor; it annoyed him to read disparaging allusions to Minna. Though she did not understand his genius, she bore — especially in their first years — the trials of life without grumbling, and she was, especially during the first visit to Paris — according to the Meister's own assurance — an excellent housewife, who lovingly and faithfully shared much sorrow and little joy with him."

The opinion of an eyewitness, the painter, Friedrich Pecht, who met the young couple at this period, may also be quoted: —

"We all liked the very pretty Frau Wagner, especially since one could no longer recognize in her the former actress; she was most amiable, and exemplary in her conduct; yet, after all, hers was a sober, unimaginative soul, entirely devoted to her husband, following him humbly wherever he went, but without a conception of his greatness, and, with all her love and devotion, still presenting an irreconcilable contrast to him with her mind set on the strict and formal commonplace relations of society."

The domestic privations began soon after their marriage. "The year which I spent in Königsberg was entirely lost to my art, through the pettiest cares. I wrote a single overture: *Rule Britannia*," [2] Wagner writes

[1] *Richard Wagner: Sein Leben und Seine Werke*, p. 16.

[2] This overture, like two others which he wrote at this period in Magdeburg and Riga — *Columbus* and *Polonia* — have never been printed. The manuscript of the *Columbus* overture is lost, while that of the *Polonia* is in the possession of Wagner's heirs.

in his *Autobiographic Sketch*, and in another place he says: "I was in love, married in a fit of obstinate recklessness, tortured myself and others under the disagreeable influence of a home without the means to keep it up, and thus sank into the misery which ruins thousands upon thousands." In brief, he had married in very much the same spirit of obstinate recklessness that had led him to bring out his *Novice of Palermo* under the most discouraging circumstances. It was fortunate that this marriage was childless. Had the support and education of a large family been added to Wagner's burdens in his early manhood, the world would probably have never seen that series of gigantic music-dramas which have revolutionized modern taste.

Domestic cares were not the only thing that troubled him at this time. He wanted to become a great composer. His operatic instinct did not leave him in peace, and led him to read novels, not as other people do, for amusement, but solely with a view to finding a subject for a libretto. *Die Hohe Braut*, a novel by Heinrich König, seemed to offer the material for a grand opera in five acts. He sketched the plot in full, but instead of working it up into a libretto for himself, he sent it to Scribe in Paris with a request to convert it into an opera-book and to let him compose the music. This step was, of course, not prompted by any distrust of his own poetic faculty, but by a desire to secure the famous Scribe as a collaborator. He had probably read that *The Huguenots* of Meyerbeer, the popular collaborator of Scribe, had in forty performances yielded three hundred thousand francs; and as Wagner never aimed at anything lower than the highest, he unhesitatingly applied at "head-

quarters." Scribe of course paid no attention to this letter from an unknown young musician, and in a subsequent communication to Wagner said he did not remember having ever received it (he probably received hundreds like it); and this was the first of a long series of disappointments which Wagner was to suffer from hopes based on Paris.

His remarkable and positively obstinate persistence in this matter is strikingly brought out in a letter which he wrote to his friend Lewald,[1] who had lived in Paris and was at that time an influential editor in Leipzig. (He was subsequently incarcerated in Berlin for nine months on account of his liberal opinions.) To him Wagner appealed, with the request to use his influence to secure the collaboration of Scribe in his operas. After explaining about the sketch he had made of the novel *Die Hohe Braut* for a libretto, he continues: —

"This sketch, accompanied by a letter, I gave to my brother-in-law Friedrich Brockhaus with the request to forward it to Paris. After waiting six months in vain for an answer, I wrote again to Scribe, and took the blame for his silence on myself, as I had to confess that he must be at a loss what to answer, since he had no knowledge whatever of me or of my faculty for composing. To remove this difficulty, I enclosed the score of my opera the *Love Veto*, or the *Novice of Palermo*, after Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. I begged him to get the opinion of Auber or Meyerbeer on this score, and to be guided thereby in the decision whether I was able to compose an opera good enough for Paris. In case this opera should meet with approval, I offered it to him also, with the

[1] Printed in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (Jan. 3, 1888), where it is explained that Wagner had a habit, from his youth to his last days, of writing a first sketch of all his letters in note-books. The one containing this letter and several others was offered at an auction sale of manuscripts, and thus found its way into the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

explanation that he could easily have a rough French translation of it made by any one and convert this at his discretion into a Scribe libretto, to be offered to the Opéra Comique.

"To this letter I received in June, 1837, a detailed answer from Scribe, which completely exonerated him of the charge of previous negligence — for he had never received the letter forwarded by Brockhaus, and therefore did not know what I desired. He thanked me for the score I had sent, begged for further details regarding my desires, and promised to do for me anything that was in his power.

"This was not so bad, and I hastened to send him, from Dresden, an old copy of the lost sketch for my five-act opera on the subject of this *Hohe Braut*. This letter I put into the post — unstamped to insure safe delivery — and that is the end of the story."

The question now was, had Scribe received this last letter? Would not Lewald try to find out and see what he could do about it? In case neither of those two projects was approved, Wagner was ready with a third one — *Rienzi*, which he declares "much grander" than its predecessors. "I intend to compose it in the German language, to make an attempt whether there is a possibility of getting it performed in Berlin, in course of fifty years, if God grant me so long a life. Perhaps Scribe will like it, in which case Rienzi will learn to sing French in a moment; or else this might be a way to goad the Berliners to accept the opera, if they were told that Paris was ready to bring it out, but that preference was for once to be given to Berlin; for a stage like that of Berlin or Paris is absolutely necessary to bring out such a work properly. There will be no lack of material or untiring effort on my part, for I feel convinced that I should have already done the Lord knows what if only the doors were once opened for me."

Wagner evidently believed in himself at this period, and this consciousness of his powers, and faith in his future, can also be read between the lines when he closes his letter to Lewald with the offer of a share in the profits, and the humorous promise that if Lewald can help him by interesting Meyerbeer or others in his cause, he will be surely rewarded by the thanks of posterity: "In that case there can be no doubt that the Germans will place an extra statue of you in the Pantheon, which no doubt they will soon erect to their great men, and the Lord, in His surprise that a German author has assisted a poor German composer to honors in Paris, will be at a loss as to what blessing to bestow on you."

THE HAPPY BEAR-FAMILY

All this correspondence, as already intimated, led to no result. Before it was written the Königsberg theatre had become bankrupt, and the unlucky Wagner was again thrown out of employment. Fortunately, his friend Dorn came to the rescue this time. He succeeded in getting for him the position of Musik-director, and for his wife a place as an actress in a new theatrical company organized by the poet Carl von Holtei in the Russian city of Riga.[1]

In the autumn of 1837 he assumed his duties at Riga, concerning which he relates: —

[1] A Königsberg correspondent of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (1837) notes Wagner's departure from that city, and adds: "He was here too short a time to be able to show his varied talents. His compositions, of which I heard one overture and saw the score of another, indicate the gift of individual creativeness. Some people are clear in their characters and their works from the beginning, others have to first work their way through a chaos of passions. *The latter, it is true, reach a higher goal.*"

"I found good material for an opera company, and went to work with much zeal to make good use of it. During this period I composed several airs for interpolation in operas by the singers. I also wrote the text of a two-act comic opera, the *Happy Bear-Family*, the subject of which I had taken from a story in the *Thousand and One Nights*. Two numbers of it were already finished when I discovered, to my disgust, that I was again on the way to compose *à la* Adam; my deepest feelings were lacerated by this discovery. I loathed the work, and left it unfinished. The daily rehearsing and conducting of the music of Auber, Adam, and Bellini soon helped to change my former delight in it to utter weariness."

This was the beginning of his recovery from his temporary aberration of taste, and the recovery was accelerated by the fact that the daily contact with theatrical life and its petty vanities and intrigues began to inspire him with as much distaste as the trivial, clap-trap music he was usually called upon to conduct. He relates somewhere that in his childhood, notwithstanding his love of the theatre and the opera, he had manifested an aversion to the thought of becoming an actor, even while he amused himself by attempts at acting in his room. The images with which his imagination had been filled on reading about the ancient Greek drama seemed to have inspired in him, as he believed, an aversion to the painted actors on the stage and their artificialities. This aversion reached a climax at Riga.

"What we understand by theatrical life (*Komödiantenwirthschaft*) soon revealed itself to me in its true light, and the opera which I had begun to compose for such a sphere suddenly began to disgust me so violently that I threw everything aside, confined my relations with the theatre more and more to the mere fulfilment of my duties as conductor, avoided all contact with the actors, and withdrew into that region of my inner self where the ardent longing to escape from my habitual surroundings was being nurtured."

In this desire for isolation he went so far as to choose his residence in a remote suburb. His aversion to stage-life did not, however, induce him to neglect his duties. On the contrary, it is on record that the singers were annoyed by the long and frequent rehearsals to which he subjected them and in which he never seemed to be satisfied, and finally they made a complaint to Director Holtei, who, though he doubtless knew that his Kapellmeister was only doing his duty, begged him "not to kill the singers" in his zeal.[1]

TWO ACTS OF RIENZI

The experiences which Wagner had so far made with his own early operas, and his observations regarding the fate of other composers, convinced him of the utter inability of provincial audiences to form a judgment concerning a new opera, unless it had already been approved at some royal institution. He therefore decided to plan his next opera on so large a scale that he would not be tempted to try it at a provincial theatre where even a success would not be likely to be more than local. In this determination he sketched the five acts of *Rienzi*, and found that the subject practically necessitated the colossal dimensions he had determined upon. The sketch was made in the summer of 1838, and in the autumn following he began to compose the music with the feeling, as he says, that he was now sufficiently advanced in his artistic development "to demand something valuable and to expect something invaluable. The thought of being consciously shallow or trivial, if only for a single

[1] Glasenapp, I. pp. 74, 75.

bar, was terrible to me. With great enthusiasm I continued to compose during the winter, so that in the spring of 1839 the first two long acts were done. About this time my contract with the theatre-director came to an end, and special circumstances made it undesirable for me to stay any longer at Riga."

These "circumstances" were of a disagreeable nature, and they were partly his fault, partly his misfortune. It was his misfortune that the failure at Magdeburg of his *Novice of Palermo*, in which he had risked his own and borrowed money, had left him saddled with debts which he had been unable to liquidate with his small salary at Königsberg. It was his fault, in part at least, that these debts continued to grow during his sojourn at Riga. The plain fact is that Wagner had more than the usual share of improvidence allotted to men of genius, and his aristocratic tastes and habits led him into many expenditures which he could have avoided. He lived, while at Riga, with his wife and one of her sisters, in an expensive suburb of the city, which compelled him to pay two or three times a day the cab-fare between his house and the theatre. His wife, still an actress, in which capacity she had shown considerable talent, had not yet developed the gift of economy which subsequently distinguished her; and that she did not bring her husband a penny of dowry may be inferred from the fact that she was the daughter of a poor spindle-maker who had eleven other children.

An interesting draught of a letter of this period has been preserved[1] in which Wagner's desperate situation is vividly painted by himself. It seems that the manager

[1] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Jan. 5, 1888.

of the opera had discharged an assistant conductor, whose duty it was to rehearse and bring out minor operas and operettas. On hearing this, Wagner wrote to one of the regisseurs, offering to do this man's work for a slight advance in his salary. He recalled the circumstance that Manager Holtei, on securing him as first conductor, had mentioned the previous engagement of an assistant conductor as a reason why he could not offer him the full salary of a thousand silver rubles, which his predecessor had obtained. The conclusion of this letter is one of those mixtures of pathos, irony, self-confidence, and humor so characteristic of Wagner: —

"I offer to do everything I can; I am willing to work for the theatre day and night, to undertake any responsibility I can carry out, willing to orchestrate whole operatic scores; but in return for this I also wish to be rescued from my present predicament; I owe that to myself and my position. . . .

"To sum up, briefly and concisely, my dear sir, I beg you to remit entirely the advance made me on my salary (excepting of course the thirty rubles which I last obtained of you, and five of which are to be deducted on every pay-day), and offer in return for this to undertake anything you may wish to charge me with, *excepting boot-blacking and water-carrying, which latter my chest could not endure at present; but I would even copy music did I not fear from such a melancholy occupation a despondent turn of my temperament.*

"The opportunity to help me is present, and I am convinced you will seize on it joyfully, were it only in order that posterity might some day be able to say of you, 'He was the man who,' etc., etc.

"Your most devoted

"Richard Wagner."

What result, if any, this letter may have had, is not known. Shortly thereafter Holtei gave up the director-

ship of the Riga theatre, and his successor, a tenor named Hoffmann, apparently had no use for Wagner, whose pecuniary embarrassments had, moreover, reached a stage which made life in Riga unbearable. For two years he had been cherishing a plan to go to Paris, which was then reputed the musical centre of the world, to seek his fortune there with his operas. This plan he was now ready to carry out. But when he tried to leave Riga he found that this was not so easy as he had fancied. His creditors had invoked the courts for assistance in collecting their dues, and when he applied for a pass he was informed that he could have one as soon as he brought proofs that his debts had been paid.

A ROMANTIC EPISODE

Wagner's trip from Riga to Pillau and thence by sailing-vessel to England has always been looked upon as one of the most interesting events in his life; but there is more romance in it than previous biographers have revealed.[1] When Wagner realized that he could not leave Riga openly, he resolved to do so secretly. To him it seemed as absurd then as it does to us now that he should be prevented from carrying out his grand operatic plans by a handful of debts. His wife was initiated into the secret plot, and one day she disguised herself as the wife of a lumberman and was taken by him as such across the Russian boundary into Germany. Wagner soon followed, assisted, it seems, by his theatrical friends, who advanced him a few months' salary to enable him to

[1] The documents on which the following narrative is based are the articles in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, above referred to, and Dorn's *Ergebnisse aus Erlebnissen* (1877, pp. 161–165).

escape his importunate creditors. He disguised himself as well as he could, but at that time it was not easy to pass the Russian boundary. "The boundary line," says Dorn, "was almost hermetically closed; every thousand yards there was a sentry box, in which a Cossack held guard, if he did not happen to be inspecting his territory; besides this, there was a patrol of pickets to watch the guards themselves." A Königsberg friend of Wagner's, Abraham Möller, had made careful preparations to facilitate his flight. He had found means to secure one of the sentry boxes as a refuge for him while its owner was on his tour of inspection; and a way was also found of keeping the pickets out of sight for the time being. Four days later Wagner was safely looking, from his window in the Arnau tavern, on Königsberg, one mile away; but fear of meeting any of his creditors there kept him from entering that city. After a brief rest, his friend Möller saw him safely to the seaport of Pillau, where he met his wife and dog, and together they embarked on a small and frail vessel for Paris and the Grand Opéra, via London.

It was a bold, almost reckless, undertaking for an impecunious artist to leave his native country, where at least he was sure of his daily bread, and plunge into the terrible wilderness of an unknown city. What others thought of Wagner's expedition may be inferred from this passage in Strodtmann's Life of the poet Heine: —

"Laube, who had been introduced by Heine to all French authors of repute and talent, made him in turn acquainted with Richard Wagner, who had carried out the bold plan of going, as an unknown musician, with a wife, an opera and a half, a small purse, and a terribly large and terribly voracious Newfoundland dog, from

Riga to London on a sailing-vessel, and from London to Paris, in the hope of winning there gold and fame: in Paris, where half Europe competes noisily for notoriety, where everything must be sold and certainly paid for, however meritorious it be, if it expects to get into the market and obtain recognition. Heine folded his hands devoutly at this confidence of a German artist. And Wagner was to find out soon enough how little chance he had, notwithstanding Meyerbeer's warm recommendations, to bring out one of his operas in Paris."

FIRST VISIT TO PARIS

A STORMY SEA-VOYAGE

WAGNER himself was too sanguine to feel any doubts as to his expedition. He felt capable of producing great things and therefore believed that all he needed to do was to go to a city where great things were appreciated to be welcomed immediately. So he went on board the sailing-vessel with a light heart, "a wife, a small purse, and an enormous Newfoundland dog." This trip is interesting, not only as a biographic event, but because it proved of the greatest artistic value to Wagner by providing him with the "local color" for both the poetry and the music of the *Flying Dutchman*. Before leaving Riga he had already become acquainted with this legend, through Heine's version of it, and many realistic details were added by the tales of the sailors and the rough experiences of the voyage, concerning which he wrote: —

"This voyage will never fade from my memory; it lasted three weeks and a half and was full of adventures. Three times we were overtaken by violent storms, and once the captain was compelled to seek safety in a Norwegian harbor. The passage through the Norwegian fjords [1] made a wondrous impression on my fancy;

[1] Praeger gives this further detail regarding this journey: "The three passengers, Richard Wagner, his wife, and dog, were miserably ill. On one occasion the bark was driven into a Norwegian fjord; the crew and its passengers — there were no others on board beside the Wagner trio — landed at a point where an old mill stood. The poor

the legend of the flying Dutchman, as I heard it confirmed by the sailors, acquired a definite, peculiar color, which only my adventures at sea could have given it. To recover from the extremely fatiguing trip, we remained a week in London, where nothing interested me so much as the city itself and the Houses of Parliament, — of the theatres I did not visit one."

Here he came near losing one of his few possessions. While living at a boarding-house in Great Compton Street, Soho, his beloved dog disappeared one day; fortunately he turned up again two days later, "to his master's frantic joy."[1]

London was too expensive a place for one whose purse was as lean as Wagner's; so, after the expiration of a week, he took his wife and his dog across the Channel to Boulogne. Now, this French town was not a cheap place either, having been a famous seaside resort even in those days. But Wagner was not only willing to deplete his purse here for another week, he actually remained four weeks, and the reason of this was that the

wretches, snatched from the jaws of death, were hospitably received by the owner, a poor man. He produced his only bottle of rum and struck joy into all their hearts by brewing a bowl of punch. It was evidently appreciated by the hapless ship's company, as Wagner was hilarious when he spoke of what he humorously called his 'Adventures at the Champagne Mill.' When the weather had cleared sufficiently, the ship set sail for London and arrived without any further mishap."

[1] Mr. Dannreuther, who relates this incident (Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, IV. p. 350), adds: "Wagner's accurate memory for localities was puzzled when he wandered about Soho with the writer in 1877 and failed to find the old house. Mr. J. Cyriax, who has zealously traced every step of Wagner's in London, 1839, '55, and '77, states that the premises have been pulled down." Details regarding Wagner's first sojourn in London, the loss of his dog and his hardly less-beloved snuff-box (which fell out of his pocket when he was boarding a ship, — and he almost fell in, too, in his attempt to rescue it), together with his impressions of London and opinions of the English, may be found in Praeger's book, Chap. VII.

one man who could best help him along in Paris was spending the summer in Boulogne. This man was Meyerbeer, who received him in the most amiable manner, examined the manuscript of the two acts of *Rienzi*, and promised to do all he could for him in Paris.[1] He gave him letters of introduction to the publisher Schlesinger, who subsequently proved a useful friend, to the directors of the Opéra and the Théâtre de la Renaissance, and to Habeneck, conductor of the Conservatory concerts. Provided with these, and with an almost empty purse, but full of hope, he entered Paris, "the illimitable city of splendor and squalor," as he described it in one of his newspaper letters.

It was a curious coincidence, and seemed a good omen, that he who was destined to become Germany's greatest dramatic composer found lodging in a house adorned with a bust indicating that Molière was born under that roof. But if, as a writer on Molière has remarked, France's own greatest dramatist had to complain of a "general conspiracy of all authors against himself," what right had Wagner, unknown and a foreigner, to expect better treatment at the hands of the French? For two years

[1] Praeger (p. 80) writes: "Indeed, Meyerbeer expressed himself so strongly on the libretto as to request Scribe to write one for him in imitation of it. When talking over this incident with me, Wagner said that he believed Meyerbeer's lavish praise of the book was uttered partly with a view to its purchase, but that Wagner's enthusiasm for his own work prevented Meyerbeer from making a direct offer. . . . Wagner said he believed Meyerbeer's laudation of the music was perfectly sincere; 'for,' he cynically added, 'the first two acts are just the very part of the opera which please me least, and which I should like to disown.'" The result of Meyerbeer's encouraging criticisms was that Wagner took Minna to a restaurant and ordered his favorite beverage, champagne, although he could afford only a pint bottle. "To Wagner," says Praeger, "champagne represented the perfection of 'terrestrial enjoyment,' as he often phrased it."

and a half — from September, 1839, to April, 1842 — he lived in Paris, and these three winters and two summers in the French capital may be described as a period of poverty, hopeless struggle for fame, and an almost uninterrupted series of disappointments. Let us briefly consider these disappointments, numbering them so as to get their cumulative impression on their victim.

A SERIES OF DISAPPOINTMENTS

First Disappointment. — The letter of recommendation to Habeneck, which Meyerbeer had given Wagner, had the good result of giving him free access to all the rehearsals of the famous Conservatoire orchestra. Here he heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony once more, and under the inspiration of it he wrote his *Faust* overture, of which more will be said in a later chapter. A further stimulus was given him by the efforts of Schlesinger to secure a performance of this overture at the Conservatory concerts and Habeneck's apparent consent. An item actually appeared in Schlesinger's paper, the *Gazette Musicale*, stating that "an overture by a remarkably talented young German composer, M. Wagner, has just been rehearsed by the Conservatory orchestra, and received with general applause. We hope soon to hear this work, and to give an account of it." The truth, however, was that the directors had declared the overture "a long enigma" and decided not to play it.[1] It is true, the same impression had been made at first on Habeneck and his musicians by the very symphony of Beethoven's, the clear and finished performance of which Wagner now admired so

[1] A. Jullien, *R. Wagner: Sa Vie et ses Œuvres*, p. 28.

much. But Habeneck had kept on rehearsing it during a second and a third winter, until every detail was intelligible. It did not occur to him that the same method might have the same results with Wagner's overture, for musicians never learn by experience. So Wagner had to suffer the pangs not only of a refusal after trial, but of disappointed hopes based on the possible consequences of a successful début at a concert of the leading institution in Paris.[1]

The *Second Disappointment* was the failure of the Renaissance theatre, just on the eve of the performance of the *Novice of Palermo,* as related in a previous chapter. Wagner had already lost his artistic interest in this trivial work, but its performance would perhaps have paved his way to the Grand Opéra, and it would also have flattered his vanity to have the news go across the Rhine that an opera of his which had failed at a German provincial theatre had proved a success in the musical centre of the world. But he was not fated to have his vanity flattered in any such way at Paris.

Third Disappointment.— Another opportunity to appear before the public as a composer was apparently given by the performance of a play by Dumas, arranged as an opera by Flotow in behalf of Polish fugitives in Paris. It occurred to Wagner that his overture *Polonia* might make

[1] Jullien (*l.c.* pp. 27, 28) makes the curious error of stating that Wagner intended to write an opera based on Goethe's *Faust*, and consequently holds the short-sighted Conservatory authorities responsible for the loss of such an opera to the world by discouraging it at the beginning. The truth of the matter is made clear by Wagner in the fourth volume of his *Gesammelte Schriften* (p. 322), where he speaks of "the rapid conception and equally rapid execution of an *orchestral* piece which I called an overture to Goethe's *Faust*, but which in reality was to form the first movement of a grand *Faust* symphony."

an acceptable and appropriate addition to the programme, so he took his only copy of the score — he was very careless about his manuscripts in those days — to the leader of the orchestra at the Renaissance, M. Duvinage, who promised to examine it, but did not produce it. Wagner left Paris without calling for his score, and he never heard of it again until forty years later, when, after a series of romantic escapes from paper-baskets, it got into the hands of the conductor Pasdeloup, and thus back to Wagner, who had it performed in Palermo on his wife's birthday, two years before his death.[1] *Habent sua fata libella!*

Fourth Disappointment.— Another way in which Wagner tried to get before the public and earn bread and butter for his family — reduced by the loss of the dog, who had been stolen, to his owner's great grief — was by composing romances to French words, in the hope that they would be sung in the salons, and there perhaps attract the attention of some manager, who might, in consequence, order an opera of their author. Flimsy castles in the air! That no one wanted his music to Heine's *Two Grenadiers* is not so surprising, for it is not one of his better efforts; but that his charming settings of Victor Hugo's *L'Attente*, Ronsard's *Mignonne*, and the cradle song *Dors, mon Enfant*, should have found neither singer to introduce them, nor publisher to print them, is strange — or rather is not strange, considering Parisian taste of that time. As a last resort, Wagner offered them to the editor Lewald for his periodical *Europa* (in which the three last-named pieces subsequently appeared),

[1] The interesting details of this story will be found in Jullien (pp. 28, 29).

accompanying his offer with the following comments, which throw a lurid light on his situation: —

"I take the liberty to send you three songs for *Europa*. You write that, on demand, you will pay from five to nine florins for a piece [$2.50 to $4]. As life in Paris is uncommonly expensive, I hope you will kindly consent to allow me the maximum, — perhaps you may even agree to add a florin in view of the extremely elegant copy." He goes on to beg that the pieces may be printed *soon*, as he needs the money: "Only a rogue would pretend to be what he is not: to such straits have they reduced me here."

A still deeper and more pathetic insight into his unfortunate situation is given by some jottings made in his diary at this time.[1] Thus he writes, under date of June 23, 1840: —

"In these dark days I am beginning to feel more and more deeply the necessity of keeping a regular diary. I hope that the writing down of my prevailing moods, and the reflections springing from them, will afford me relief, as tears do to a heart oppressed. Tears have come into my eyes unbidden this moment; is it a proof of cowardice or of unhappiness to yield willingly to tears? A young German journeyman was here; he was in poor health, and I bade him come again for his breakfast. Minna took the occasion to remind me that she was about to send away our last pennies for bread. You poor woman! Right you are; our situation is a sad one, and if I reflect on it, I can foresee with certainty that the greatest conceivable misery is in store for us; an accident only can bring improvement; for an accident I must almost consider the contingency of being helped by others voluntarily and without any personal interest; this last hope would be humiliating if I were convinced that I could expect nothing but alms; fortunately I am compelled to assume that men like Meyerbeer and Laube would not help me unless they believed that I *deserved* help. Weakness, caprice, and accident may, however, still intervene and estrange

[1] Printed in *Der Zeitgeist*, Nos. 18–20, 1886.

these persons from me. That is a terrible thought; and this doubt and the uncertainty regarding their good will is painful and sickens my heart."

On June 29 we find this entry in the diary:—

"How this is to come out next month I do not know; my fears are turning to despair. I have now indeed an opportunity to earn a trifle by writing articles for the *Gazette Musicale;* I shall also send articles to Lewald in Stuttgart for *Europa*, to see if I can make some money that way. Yet in the most favorable case I cannot avoid being crushed by what is impending at this moment. Twenty-five francs is all I have left. With this I am expected to pay on the first a bill of exchange for 150 francs, and on the fifteenth my quarterly rent is due. All fountains are dry. From my poor wife I am still concealing the pass at which we have arrived; I constantly hoped Laube would send something; I would then have told her how, without him, we could have had nothing to count upon, and how I had kept it secret from her, so as not to add to the cares which have already shaken her constitution. But now I fear this will be impossible. On the first I shall have to reveal the secret. The Lord help us! that will be a terrible day, unless assistance arrives."

Praeger relates (85) that—

"after one more wretched day than the last, he suggested to Minna the raising of temporary loans upon her trinkets. Let the reader try and realize the proud Wagner's misery and anguish when Minna confessed that such as she had were already so disposed of. . . . It was then, in this hour of tribulation, that the golden qualities of Minna were proved. . . . The hitherto quiet and gentle housewife was transformed into a heroine. . . . Thoughts of what the self-denying devoted little woman did then have many a time brought tears to Wagner's eyes. The most menial house duties were performed by her with willing cheerfulness. She cleaned the house, stood at the wash-tub, did the mending and the cooking. She hid from her husband as much of the discomforts attaching to their poor home as was possible. She

never complained, and always strove to present a bright, cheerful face, consoling and upholding him at all times. In the evening she and his dog, the same that was temporarily lost in London, were his regular companions on the boulevards."

Fifth Disappointment.—Temporary assistance may have arrived, for Wagner writes elsewhere that he did not know till he came to Paris the full meaning of the word "friendship," but his efforts to help himself by keeping in his proper sphere as composer continued to be failures. Humbled by his ill luck, and urged on by the pressure of debts, he actually undertook the task of writing the music of an ordinary carnival vaudeville: "but in this, too, I was frustrated," he writes, "by the jealousy of a musical money-maker"; and Jullien records that "at the first rehearsals the actors declared that his music could not be executed, so it had to be given up."

Sixth Disappointment. — As a composer he could not descend any lower than this; and as he had never acquired mechanical dexterity on an instrument, he could not apply for a place in an orchestra. But he had a voice, and the thought occurred to him that he might perhaps get a place as *chorus singer* in a small Boulevard theatre. "I came out of this," he writes, "worse than Berlioz did when he found himself in a similar predicament. The leader of the orchestra, who had to examine me, discovered at once that I could not sing at all, and that he had no use for me."

The fact of the future composer of the *Nibelung Trilogy* and *Parsifal* being found unfit to sing in the chorus of a second-rate Boulevard theatre is perhaps as comic as any incident in the whole history of music. But it has its pathetic side in showing to what extremities a series of

was with a view to its performance in a German theatre. A change for the better seemed imminent, when Meyerbeer, who unfortunately had been absent from Paris most of this time, returned. He was the only one of the great musicians in Paris that took an interest in Wagner, whose acquaintance with French composers and others[1] led to no tangible results, as they all seemed too much taken up with their own affairs to look after struggling young composers. Not so Meyerbeer, who at once inquired after the fate of his protégé, and, finding him in such desperate straits, took him to Leon Pillet, the director of the Grand Opéra, with a view of securing for him an order to compose a short opera in two or three acts. The subject was already at hand, namely, the story of the Flying Dutchman, which had haunted Wagner ever since his sea-voyage. He made an arrangement with Heine for the use of those features in the story which were added by him, and having made a sketch of the plot, he handed it to Leon Pillet with the request to have it worked up into a libretto in French verse.

[1] Among Wagner's famous acquaintances in Paris were Berlioz, Halévy, Scribe, Vieuxtemps, and the Germans Kietz, Laube, and Heine. Auber he appears not to have met on this first visit, although he admired his operas, and on one occasion came near losing his only source of income by writing an article for the *Gazette Musicale*, extolling Auber and chiding the French for their partiality to Donizetti and Rossini. The editor refused to publish this article against the idols of the day, and told Wagner to "leave politics (!) alone." It would have been interesting to know Heine's opinion of Wagner, but he had no opportunity to hear his music. Theodore Hagen relates that Heine once said to him, "Do you know what I find suspicious about Wagner? The fact that Meyerbeer recommends him." To Laube, Heine once remarked: "I cannot help feeling a lively interest in Wagner. He is endowed with an inexhaustible, productive mind, kept in constant activity by a lively temperament. From an individuality so replete with modern culture we may expect the development of a solid and powerful modern music."

So far matters had progressed when Meyerbeer once more left Paris. Not long thereafter Wagner was astounded to hear from M. Pillet that he liked his sketch and wished him to let him have it for another composer to whom he had promised a libretto some time before! The director added that Wagner would no doubt be the more willing to agree to this arrangement as he could give him no hope of bringing out his own opera before the expiration of four years, and in the meantime he could easily find another subject for it! Wagner was naturally indignant at this offer and refused to accept it, hoping for the return of Meyerbeer to set matters right again.

In the spring he left the city to live at Meudon, and there he heard one day that M. Pillet had actually gone so far, without his consent, as to give his *Flying Dutchman* sketch into the hands of the poet Paul Fouché, to be made into a libretto for that "other composer," who proved to be a man named Dietsch. Fearing that, under some pretext or other, he might lose his rights to his sketch altogether, Wagner at last agreed to sell it for five hundred francs. He had his revenge, however; for the *Vaisseau Fantôme*, in a version differing greatly from his own plan, and with music by Dietsch, proved a failure, and was shelved after eleven performances. M. Dietsch was doubtless convinced that the cause of his failure was Wagner's sketch; and he, too, had his "revenge" eighteen years later, when he was conductor at the Grand Opéra, as we shall see when we come to the romantic story of *Tannhäuser* in Paris.

Meyerbeer's efforts to help along Wagner were in every case so fruitless — and Meyerbeer was a very influential man at that time — that there is some justification for

doubt as to whether he was really sincere in his attempts to assist him. Mr. Dannreuther remarks on this point:[1]—

"What did Meyerbeer do by way of patronage? He wrote a letter introducing Wagner to M. Pillet, fully aware that there was not a ghost of a chance for an unknown German at the Opéra. To foist Wagner, with his *Liebesverbot*, upon Antenor Joly and the Théâtre de la Renaissance was, in the eyes of Parisians, little better than a practical joke; twice or thrice in the year that rotten concern had failed and risen again: 'mon théâtre est mort, vive mon théâtre,' was M. Joly's motto. Meyerbeer introduced Wagner to his publisher, Schlesinger. And this is all that came to pass at Paris — unless the fact be taken into account that Scribe imitated an important scene from *Rienzi* in *Le Prophète* without acknowledgment."

LOSS OF THE COLUMBUS OVERTURE

The letter of introduction to Schlesinger, on the other hand, proved of the greatest utility to Wagner, who might have literally starved while composing his first two great operas — *Rienzi* and the *Flying Dutchman* — had it not been for the employment given him by the publisher Schlesinger in the arrangement of music for various instruments and in writing articles for his musical paper. Schlesinger was even the means of bringing about Wagner's one opportunity of appearing as a composer before a Parisian audience. At a concert given for the subscribers to his paper, the *Gazette Musicale*, he placed at the head of the programme the *Columbus* overture, which Wagner had written at the age of twenty-two, — a piece of which Laube has remarked that it showed its composer undecided as to whether he should follow Beethoven or

[1] Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. IV. p. 358.

Bellini, and which accordingly made an impression somewhat like a Hegelian essay written in the style of Heine. A French critic, Henri Blanchard, discussing its performance in Paris, put the question whether Wagner intended to represent the infinity of the ocean, the horizon that seemed endless to the companions of Columbus, by means of the tremolos on the high notes of the violins. He found that the brass was used too frequently, yet the overture seemed to be "the work of an artist having grand, definite ideas and well acquainted with the resources of modern instrumentation."

This performance also was the occasion of Wagner's being once more, after a long interval, brought to the notice of his countrymen. The Leipzig *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, edited by Schumann, had this notice: —

"At the ninth concert which Herr Schlesinger gave to his subscribers, on Feb. 4, there was performed, among other things, an overture by Richard Wagner, a Saxon, if we are not mistaken, who seemed to have disappeared from the musical world, but who, we are glad to see, is showing himself active again."

In short, the reception of this overture was sufficiently favorable to prompt its author to send it to Jullien in London with a request to have it performed at a promenade concert. Jullien, however, returned the manuscript, and when it was brought back, Wagner had not money enough to pay the cost of transportation from London to Paris. The package consequently remained in the hands of the company, and was probably sold as waste-paper. At least, all the later efforts of Wagner's friends to trace it proved futile.[1]

[1] These details were given by Wagner himself to a friend of Jullien's who first recorded them. A few further details are given by Praeger, p. 63.

Thus, even the one apparent exception to Wagner's Parisian disappointments proved a misfortune in the end; for although the *Columbus* overture, which represents the great navigator previously to the discovery of America and at the moment when land was first espied, was not one of his most valuable compositions, it would have been of extreme interest as a curiosity, especially during the Columbus Centennial celebrations.

MUSICAL DRUDGERY

The employment which Schlesinger gave Wagner — proof-reading and arranging popular melodies and operas for the piano and other instruments, including even the vulgar cornet-à-piston, — was not at all to the taste of the ambitious young genius who longed to give all his time to creative work; but under the circumstances it was a godsend, without which he would have been crushed by his poverty, which gradually became so oppressive that, as he wrote to Liszt some years later, he was sometimes tempted by his empty stomach to commit a crime. Among the arrangements made at this time, one deserves to be mentioned in full, because it places in curious juxtaposition the creator of the music-drama with the chief perpetrator of the now almost obsolete prima-donna operas: "*La Favorite*, opera in four acts by Scribe, German version by A. Wagner. Music by G. Donizetti. Complete pianoforte score with German and French text, by Richard Wagner. Berlin: Schlesinger."

A few years previously, the arrangement of this kind of music would have been less irksome to the future composer of *Parsifal* — in 1835, for instance, when he wrote

an article on Bellini entitled "A Word in Time"[1] in which he lauded Bellini and vocal melody at the expense of German opera-composers, and expressed sentiments directly opposed to those which his more mature judgment began to approve about this time. The final impulse which induced him to retrace his "Step Backward" from Beethoven to Bellini was his observation of the methods of famous Italian singers at the Grand Opéra. Here he could see plainly that operas were popular in proportion as they gave the singers opportunities for brilliant displays of technical skill, while singers were popular in proportion to their lack of conscience in tickling the public's ears with these meaningless feats of virtuosity, regardless of dramatic truth. The singer was everything: the composer and his work nothing. His Parisian correspondence to German papers is full of sarcastic references to this class of singers — and hearers; and in one of the essays included in his *Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. I. pp. 207–222) entitled "the Virtuoso and the Artist" he gives a most amusing account of a performance at the Opéra of Mozart's *Don Juan*, a work which obviously discommoded the singers and bored the audience. Yet the house was crowded, and every one seemed on the tiptoe of expectation: and why? ***Because on this evening Rubini sang his famous trill on A and B.***

"Rubini did not become truly divine until he got on to his B; *that* he had to get onto if an evening at the Italian opera was to have any object. Now, just as a circus-tumbler balances himself on his board before he jumps, so Rubini stands on his F for three bars, swells it for two bars cautiously but irresistibly, but on the third

[1] In the *Figaro Zuschauer*. Reprinted in Kürschner's *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886, p. 381.

bar he seizes the trill of the violins on the A, sings it with increasing vehemence, jumps up, on the fourth, to the B, as if it were the easiest thing in the world, and then, before everybody's eyes, executes a brilliant roulade and plunges down into silence. That was the end; anything else might happen now, no matter what. All the demons were unchained, not on the stage, as at the end of the opera, but in the auditorium. The riddle was solved: it was to hear this feat that the audience had assembled, had, for two hours, put up with the absence of all the accustomed operatic *delicatessen*, had pardoned Grisi and Lablache for taking this music seriously, and were now divinely rewarded by the success of this one wonderful moment when Rubini jumped up onto his B."

STORIES AND ESSAYS

This essay, in which Wagner shows so vividly how the opera in Paris had sunk to the level of the circus,—appealing to the sense of astonishment at feats of mechanical skill instead of to the æsthetic and dramatic sense,—is by no means his only literary effort of this period which proves that Laube was quite right when he wrote in 1843, by way of prefacing the publication of Wagner's *Autobiographic Sketch*, that the Parisian experiences had also made of the musician an author whose "copy" could not be improved by "editing." The literary products of these years which Wagner deemed good enough, in 1871, to reprint in his Collected Works, include two novelettes: *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*, *An End in Paris;* a dialogue on the nature of music, entitled *A Happy Evening;* and essays on *Music in Germany*, *The Virtuoso and the Artist*, *The Artist and Publicity*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, *On the Overture;* besides two essays on the performance of the *Freischütz*, one being intended for French readers, the other for Germans, and an *Account of a New Parisian Opera*, Halévy's *Reine de Chypre*.

Although these articles appeared in a French paper, *The Gazette Musicale*, Wagner wrote them in German, as he did not have the gift of his friends Heine and Liszt of writing equally well in these two languages. Of the first two on the above list the original German has been preserved; the others were re-translated by Wagner's second wife, Cosima, daughter of Liszt. The articles on musical life in Paris which he wrote for several German papers — the *Dresdener Abendzeitung*, Lewald's *Europa*, and Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift* (which printed the amusing article on Rossini's *Stabat Mater*), — were excluded by him from the *Gesammelte Schriften*.[1]

TRUTH IN FICTION. — PERSONAL REVELATIONS

If Goethe gave his autobiography the title of *Truth and Fiction*, Wagner conversely might have called his Paris sketches *Autobiographic Novelettes and Essays;* for no one who is at all familiar with his adventures in Paris can fail constantly to read between the lines of these articles their author's own experiences and aspirations. The *Pilgrimage to Beethoven* begins with a sarcastic invocation to Poverty and Care, his constant companions, who have always kindly protected him from the oppressive sunlight of fortune. Then follows a genuine autobiographic touch: —

"A medium-sized town of Central Germany was my birthplace. I do not recall clearly what I was intended to become, but I remember that one evening I heard a Beethoven symphony for the first time, that I had an attack of fever thereafter, and that, when I had recovered, I had become a musician. This may explain

[1] Some of these are reprinted, with notes, in Kürschner's *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886, pp. 273–286.

why, although in course of time I became familiar with other beautiful music, I still loved and worshipped Beethoven above all. I ceased to know any other pleasure but that of immersing myself in the deeps of his genius until I came to imagine myself to be a part of him, and as this smallest part I began to respect myself, to adopt nobler views and ideals; in short, I became what wise people commonly call a fool."

This enthusiasm leads to the desire to go to Vienna, solely to have the supreme pleasure of seeing the great master. To earn the necessary money he writes sonatas, but gets laughed at for his pains, and finally he is obliged to degrade himself by writing galops and operatic arrangements, which at last leads to his goal. His adventures on the way with a band of strolling Bohemian musicians and with an eccentric Englishman cannot be related here for lack of space. But the following remarks on the opera, which he takes the liberty to put in the mouth of Beethoven, are very interesting as showing that the composer of *Rienzi* was at the age of twenty-seven already quite clear in his mind regarding some of the essential features of the modern music-drama: —

"'Annoying labor!' exclaimed Beethoven (with reference to the revision of his *Fidelio* to make it more palatable to opera-goers of his day): 'I am not an opera-composer, at least know no theatre for which I would care to write another opera! If I were to write an opera after my own mind, people would run away; for they would find in it none of the arias, duets, terzets, and all the stuff with which people at present make up an operatic patch-work; and what I would write in their place no vocalist would want to sing, no auditor to hear. The only thing they know is glittering unreality, brilliant nonsense, and sugar-coated tediousness. Were any one to write a true music-drama, he would be considered a fool, and would indeed be one if he did not make it for himself alone, but tried to bring it before the public.'"

No artist has ever so strikingly foreseen and prophesied his whole career as Wagner did his own in these words, which were penned between the composition of *Rienzi* and the *Flying Dutchman*, in this first novelette, of which Jullien says that it struck its Parisian readers so much "by its mixture of poetry and raillery, of enthusiasm and bitterness, that Berlioz, a good critic in such matters, considered it worth while to insert a special notice of it in the *Journal des Débats*." Indeed, it is not too much to say that Heine himself, in his letters from Paris, did not use a better literary style, or keener wit and irony — with the same sentimental undercurrent — than Wagner did in some of his sketches, notably in those entitled the *Virtuoso and the Artist* and *Le Freischütz*, which are admirable samples of sarcasm, persiflage, and artistic insight.[1]

In the second novelette, *Ein Ende in Paris*, the hero is the same poor young musician who had gone to Vienna to see Beethoven. He is now in Paris, with the determination to succeed or perish: "*In one year from now*," he tells his friend, "*you will be able to find out my residence from every boy in the streets, or else you will receive a notice from me where you must go — to see me die.*"[2] He goes

[1] English versions of some of these novelettes and essays may be found in Burlingame's *Wagner's Art Life and Theories*.

[2] Great as was Wagner's confidence in his own genius, he would have been doubtless astounded could he have been foretold how very literally this semi-autobiographic prophecy would be fulfilled half a century later. The Paris *Figaro* of Sept. 17, 1891, gives an account of the preparations made by the police to meet the 20,000 persons who were expected to "demonstrate" on the occasion of the first performance of *Lohengrin* at the Grand Opéra. In the crowd was an old woman, well known to all frequenters of the Boulevards, who was knocked down in the rush. When she was picked up, she exclaimed, "What in the world is going on here?" "Here was a person who did not know Wagner!"

through the same stages as Wagner — tries honest operatic work; tries songs; degrades himself to the level of the public by writing trivial dance music; but the directors procrastinate their promises, artists have no ear for him, the newspapers are ruled by cliques; his enemy even steals his dog, his only solace, for whom he has saved all his crusts till he himself is thrown on his death-bed by starvation. After the funeral, his friend writes: —

"It was a sad affair. The keen wintry air choked the breath; no one could speak, and the funeral address was omitted. And yet I must tell you that he whom we buried here was a good man, a brave German musician. He had a kind heart and *often wept when he saw how the poor horses were tortured in the streets of Paris.* He was of a gentle disposition and never lost his temper when the street urchins pushed him off the narrow sidewalks. Unfortunately he had a tender conscience, was ambitious, *had no talent for intrigue*, and once had in his youth seen Beethoven, which turned his head so completely that he could not possibly get along in Paris."

I have italicized two lines in the above extract, because they call attention to two of the most prominent traits in Wagner's character, — his love of animals and his inability to further his own cause except in the most straightforward and *stubbornly honest* way, which made him so many enemies among ignorant operatic managers, incompetent artists, and bloated critics.

"I had not considered," writes the friend of the dead musician, "that I had to deal, not with one of those individuals whose persuasions are easily acquired and altered, but with a man whose faith

the *Figaro* writer concludes ("*En voilà une qui ne connait pas Wagner*"). *Lohengrin* was given sixty-one times between Sept. 16, 1891, and Sept. 16, 1892, the receipts being over a million francs.

in the divine and indisputable truth of his art had reached such a degree of fanaticism that it imposed on a character that was naturally most peaceful and tender an inflexibly stubborn aspect." Another conspicuous trait, illustrated by Wagner himself.

IN THE WORKSHOP OF GENIUS

Into Wagner's inner life none of the essays of this period affords a deeper insight than the one on *The Artist and Publicity.* Especially remarkable, as showing the natural affinity between the greatest musician and the greatest philosopher of the nineteenth century, is the following sentence written by Wagner many years before he became acquainted with Schopenhauer's writings, and touching on one of the great pessimist's favorite topics (see his chapter on "Genius," in the second volume of his *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*). "Happy the genius on whom fortune has never smiled! — Genius is so much unto itself! What more could fortune add?" This thought Wagner develops in another paragraph which takes us into the very workshop of creative genius: —

"When I am alone, and the musical fibres within me vibrate, and heterogeneous sounds form themselves into chords whence at last springs the melody which reveals to me my inner self; if then the heart in loud beats marks the impetuous rhythms, and rapture finds vent in divine tears through the mortal, no-longer-seeing eyes — then do I often say to myself: What a fool you are not to remain always by yourself, to live only for these unique delights, instead of struggling to get before that horrible multitude which is called the public, in order to get the absurd permission to continue the exercise of your talent for composing! What can this public, with its most brilliant reception, offer you to equal in value even the one-hundredth part of that holy rapture which comes from within?"

Why, nevertheless, genius struggles for publicity, is the question Wagner tries to answer in this essay, which is very suggestive reading. Here I have room for only one more passage, which, if I am not very much mistaken, depicts Wagner's own state of mind and his actions when he was inspired with the plan of the *Flying Dutchman* — the first opera in which he is really himself: —

"Happy the genius on whom fortune has never smiled. — Genius is so much unto itself! What more could fortune add?

"That is what he says to himself, smiles, and laughs, and new strength comes over him; it dawns and grows: something new resounds within him, more clear and rapturous than ever. A work, such as he himself had never dreamed of, grows and flourishes in quiet solitude. This is it! That is the right thing! All the world will surely be enchanted: hear it once and then — ! See how the madman runs! It is the old street, which now seems new and delightful to him; the mud bespatters him; here he runs against a lackey in full uniform, whom he mistakes for a general and greets respectfully; there he collides with a no less worthy bank messenger, with a well-filled money-bag on his shoulder, and comes off with a bleeding nose. All these are good signs! He runs and stumbles, and finally arrives again in the sanctum of his misery!"

THE LION SHOWS HIS CLAWS

That a genius with such a creative *furor* should not have been allowed, during almost three years, to appear more than once before the Parisian public — and even then only with one of his most immature overtures; that he should have been kept from creative activity by the necessity of making "potboilers" (musically: *potpourris*) — in 1841, during nine months at a stretch, he had to give all his time to such "ignoble work," as he calls it — that he had to borrow of friends, borrow his furniture, lose

his *Columbus* overture because he could not pay the expressage on it; that, during all this time, his mind was harassed by anxiety regarding to-morrow's bread and the anguish of seeing his poor wife share all these sorrows, — surely this was enough to turn the most amiable enthusiast into a sour misanthropist and a revolutionary. "I now entered on a new path — that of *revolt against the present state of artistic life*, with whose conditions I had endeavored to make friendship when I sought its most brilliant centre in Paris." It was this feeling of a necessary revolt that (besides the pangs of hunger) had made him seize the pen to write criticisms. When Schlesinger first invited his young protégé to write articles for his paper (besides arranging scores and popular melodies), "it was all the same to him," says Wagner, "but not to me. While regarding that musical drudgery as my deepest humiliation, I seized the literary pen to avenge myself for that humiliation. . . . In my novelettes I narrated in a fictitious form, and with considerable humor, my own experiences, especially in Paris, up to the death by starvation which I fortunately escaped. What I wrote was in every line a cry of revolt against our modern art-life. I have been repeatedly assured that this afforded considerable amusement."

Wagner has been often censured for his brusque and polemic ways. But he was a peaceful and amiable man in his youth (to his friends all his life) — a sleeping lion, who might have remained gentle had he been gently treated; but as his fur was almost incessantly rubbed the wrong way, is it a wonder that he began to put out his claws before he was thirty, and to growl louder and louder at a world that would not believe he was a lion until it had felt his heavy paws?

COMPOSITION OF THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

The thirty months spent in Paris were, however, by no means wasted. They cured him of his love of the cheap operatic tricks of Donizetti, Hérold, and Adam, and made him return to his first love — Weber and Beethoven; they cured him forever of the desire to win success by writing down to the popular taste — *he never again stooped to conquer;* while the vanity, insincerity, and trickiness of the famous Italian singers in Paris showed him how unjust he had been to the artists of his own country. The reason why the German singers had seemed bunglers was (as he points out in his Parisian essay on *Music in Germany*, Vol. I. p. 189) that they were asked to sing Italian colorature arias which were unsuited for German throats. Give them *German* vocal music to sing, and you will find that "these bunglers are the truest artists, and are imbued with a warmer glow in their hearts than was ever diffused over you by those who have hitherto delighted you in your elegant saloons." He was soon to discover the literal truth of this assertion, in the devotion of Tichatschek and Schroeder-Devrient, and later in the noble art and conscientious endeavors of Schnorr von Carolsfeld, the Vogls, Niemann, Betz, Scaria, Materna, Malten, Sucher, Brandt, and many others, who have helped to create a new art of realistic dramatic song. But the most important result of his first visit to Paris was that, notwithstanding the endless petty interruptions and cares, he found time to finish *Rienzi* and compose the whole of the *Flying Dutchman*. Two acts of *Rienzi* were, as we have seen,

finished at Riga before the composer left for Paris, where the other three acts were completed in 1840. When he wrote these last acts he had already given up the hope of seeing this opera in Paris, and it was some German opera-house that he had in view — especially Dresden, which had at that time the best dramatic singers, and was about to have a new opera-house.

As regards the *Flying Dutchman*, its history has been told up to the day when its author, fearing to lose his sketch altogether, had sold it for five hundred francs. Fortunately there was nothing in the contract to prevent his using the same sketch to make a libretto for himself; and so, as the weird subject had already taken full possession of him, he set to work immediately. Not in Paris, however. The approach of spring (1841) had awakened his ardent longing for country life. Country life near Paris was, however, a luxury not easily obtainable.

"It is not possible," he exclaims (in one of his letters to German newspapers entitled *Pariser Amüsements*), "to retire into solitude, out of reach of the influence of Parisian life, without making a considerable journey. Happy the banker who can make such journeys! Happy the born Parisian who needs no such journeys! But woe to the German residing in Paris who is not a banker! He will be surely swallowed up in this sea of unenjoyed enjoyments if he does not succeed in becoming a banker. Ye 30,000 Germans in Paris, may you succeed in this!"

At last he was fortunate in finding a quiet place, near a forest, at Meudon, two leagues from the city, where there was nothing to interfere with his creative activity. To compose the opera, he relates, he needed an instrument: —

"For after nine months' interruption of all composition, I had to create a new musical atmosphere. So I hired a piano, and after it had arrived my mind was greatly disturbed; I feared to make the discovery that I was no longer a musician. With the sailors' chorus and the spinning song I began, and loudly did I give vent to my sincere joy on discovering that I was still a musician. In seven weeks the whole opera was completed. At the end of this time the pettiest cares began to oppress me again; two entire months elapsed before I could get a chance to write the overture for the finished opera, although I carried it about in my head almost complete.

"Of course my most ardent desire was now to bring out the opera in Germany as soon as possible; from Munich and Leipzig I received refusals; the opera was not suited for Germany, I was told. Fool that I was, I had imagined it was suited specially for Germany, since it touches chords which can vibrate only in a German. At last I sent the score to Meyerbeer in Berlin, with the request to secure its acceptance at the Court Theatre there. With considerable promptness this was effected.[1] As my *Rienzi* had in the meantime also been accepted at Dresden, I now looked forward to the performance of two of my operas at the leading German theatres, and involuntarily the conviction forced itself on me that, strange to say, Paris had proved to me of the greatest use as regards Germany. In Paris itself I had no prospects for some years to come, so I left it in the spring of 1842. For the first time I saw the Rhine; with tears in my eyes I, the poor artist, swore eternal allegiance to my German fatherland."

With these words Wagner closes his admirable *Autobiographic Sketch*, and as his *Mittheilung an Meine Freunde* also does not contain many personal details of a later date, we shall henceforth have to rely for authentic information at first hand on other documents, chief among which are the letters to and from Liszt; to his

[1] But between the promise and the performance several years elapsed.

Dresden friends Uhlig, Fischer, and Heine;[1] to Frau Wille, Praeger, and others.

Fortunately, Wagner leaped into sudden fame on his return to Dresden, so that from this time on the newspapers and periodicals are full of information regarding him. This source of information can and will, however, only be used with the greatest caution, since there has never been a man, outside of politics, concerning whom so many malicious and stupid falsehoods have been printed as concerning Richard Wagner — for four decades, from the first performance of *Rienzi*, in 1842, to the first performance of *Parsifal*, in 1882, and even later.

[1] These letters have been published in three volumes by Breitkopf & Härtel, in Leipzig. Excellent English versions were made soon after their appearance, of the Wagner-Liszt letters by the late Dr. F. Hueffer, and of the letters to Dresden friends by Mr. J. S. Shedlock. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons. In regard to the *Autobiographic Sketch* it may be added here that the slight changes which Wagner made in it when the article was reprinted in his Collected Works are carefully noted in the *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886 (pp. 288–289).

RIENZI IN DRESDEN

PRELIMINARY LETTERS

THE biographer of the famous Wagnerian tenor Tichatschek, relates that one day, towards the close of 1840, the Intendent of the Dresden Opera received from Paris the manuscript of a new opera, which was so enormously bulky that its size and weight alone, apart from the fact that its author was unknown to fame, would have sufficed to make most managers decide, without opening it, that it was not suited for performance. It was the score of *Rienzi*, and was accompanied by two letters both dated Dec. 4, 1840, one addressed to the General-Director, Herr von Lüttichau, the other to Friedrich August II., King of Saxony. From the letter to Lüttichau two passages may be quoted here:[1]—

"It has always been one of my most alluring hopes that one of my dramatic compositions might be performed at the Court Theatre in the capital of my native country, and latterly I have devoted most of my time to the completion of an opera, the principal rôles in which I wrote especially with a view to their interpretation by some talented artists who enjoy the good fortune of being connected with the Dresden Opera. This work, a five-act opera entitled *Rienzi*, I have just completed, and now hasten to send your Excellency the score and the text-book, together with the

[1] These letters are printed complete in Robert Proelss's *Geschichte des Hoftheaters in Dresden*, p. 118 *seq.*

request that you might permit the first performance to take place in the Court Theatre. . . .

"When I made up my mind to write a grand opera with the intention of offering it to the Dresden Court Theatre for the first performance, I discovered that the plan of building a new and magnificent theatre was about to be realized; the reports I received regarding the grand dimensions of this projected building led me to conceive the *mise-en-scène* of my opera in a sumptuous manner, corresponding to the character of such a theatre. Your Excellency will therefore see by a glance at my poem that the work might perhaps be specially adapted to be placed on the list of new works that have been chosen for the first performances in the new house. Perhaps I may even be pardoned the boldness of pointing out that it might not be at all improper to give an honorable place on this list to the work of a Saxon who has honestly endeavored to consecrate to his country his best and most mature artistic efforts."

In the letter to the King, whom he addresses as "Allerdurchlauchtigster Herr, Allergnädigster Herr und König," Wagner recalls the fact that his stepfather Geyer had been honored by permission to paint the portraits of the royal family; and in the concluding paragraph he begs his Majesty's permission to dedicate his opera to him.

Nothing was apparently attained through these letters except the retention of the manuscript for future reference. To accelerate matters, Wagner again applied to Meyerbeer, who addressed the following letter to Lüttichau: —

"Your Excellency will pardon me, I am sure, if I molest you with these lines, for I remember your constant good-will towards me so well that I could not refuse the request of an interesting young countryman, who perhaps has a too flattering confidence in my influence on your Excellency, to assist his project with these

lines. Herr Richard Wagner of Leipzig is a young composer who has not only had a thorough musical education, but who possesses much imagination, as well as general literary culture, and whose predicament certainly merits in every way sympathy in his native country. His most ardent wish is to produce his opera *Rienzi*, of which he has written both the text and the music, in the new royal theatre in Dresden. Some selections from it which he played for me I found rich in conception [phantasiereich] and of great dramatic effect. May the young artist enjoy the protection of your Excellency, and find occasion to see his remarkable talent more widely appreciated. I once more implore your Excellency's pardon, and beg you to preserve towards me your gracious good-will. Most respectfully

"Your Excellency's most obedient servant,

"MEYERBEER."

Not till three months later, however, did Wagner receive from the royal director the announcement that *Rienzi* had been accepted; and this decision was owing chiefly, it seems, to the efforts of Tichatschek, who saw at once what a fine heroic rôle this opera offered him, and of the Chorus-Director, Wilhelm Fischer, who subsequently became one of Wagner's most intimate friends. Half a year before he left Paris he began to correspond with Fischer regarding the projected performance of *Rienzi* in Dresden; while the letters to Ferdinand Heine, an old friend of the Wagner family, who was at that time designer of costumes at the Court Theatre, begin even six months sooner — which shows how long-deferred were Wagner's hopes, even after the acceptance of his opera. Indeed, between its formal acceptance and its performance on Oct. 20, 1842, no fewer than sixteen months elapsed. Of the tortures to which Wagner was subjected during this period of

suspense his letters to Fischer and Heine give many striking illustrations.[1]

The first of the letters to Ferdinand Heine is interesting as showing that half a century ago some German theatre-goers appear to have had similar scruples regarding religious representations on the stage to those that still prevail in England. Religious objections had been made against the plot of *Rienzi*. To overcome these Wagner points out that Catholic costume was involved in this case rather than Catholic principles; that the Pope appears not as a religious authority but in his capacity as a worldly ruler; and that precedents for his proceedings could be found in the operas *La Juive* and *Les Huguenots*. He concludes with these words: —

"Priests and ecclesiastics have, I presume, marched in solemn procession across the Dresden stage before this? I should be obliged if you would confirm this belief. Besides, no one is better qualified than you, my dear sir, to give the costume a certain mixed effect, which, *e.g.*, will make it impossible for the Censor to definitely point out a cardinal, although every spectator can recognize him." (Sly dog!)

These religious difficulties having been overcome, other obstacles arose to procrastinate matters. Before *Rienzi* could be thought of, *Adèle de Foix*, the seventh opera of the third-rate composer, Reissiger, who was conductor of the Dresden Opera, had to be brought out. Reissiger pretended, at first, to be interested in *Rienzi*, and wrote Wagner a letter to that effect; but when the tantalizing procrastinations began, he refused to answer a single

[1] They should be read by all who are interested in *Rienzi*, especially by those who take part in its performance, as they contain a great many valuable hints for its correct interpretation not recorded elsewhere.

line to Wagner's numerous letters of inquiry. Nor did Tichatschek deign to reply to his letters. Regarding Schroeder-Devrient, who was to create the rôle of Adriano, he wrote to Heine: —

"I believe I have already written her a dozen letters: that she has not sent me a single word in reply does not surprise me very much, because I know how some people detest letter-writing; but that she has never sent me indirectly a word or a hint disquiets me greatly. Great Heavens! so very much depends on her; it would be truly humane on her part if she would only send me this message — perhaps by her chambermaid — 'Calm yourself! I am interested in your cause!'"

He even had gone so far as to flatter this prima donna's pride by begging her to name the person who should sing the part of Irene (imagine the later Wagner doing such a thing!) — without receiving a reply. Then he heard that another opera, Halévy's *Guitarrero* (of which he himself had had to make the pianoforte score before he could raise the funds to leave Paris) was to precede *Rienzi*. The final blow was given by the news that, owing to a caprice of Schroeder-Devrient's, *Rienzi* was to be postponed once more for a revival of Gluck's *Armida*. It was getting on towards Easter, and it seemed probable that *Rienzi* would not be given at all that season. This probability caused him to pour out his heart in a most pathetic letter to Heine, imploring him to leave no stone unturned to accelerate matters: —

"If you or any one else knew just exactly how my whole situation, all my plans, all my resolutions, would be annihilated by such a procrastination, you would have pity on me. . . . I am really quite exhausted! Alas! I have so few pleasant experiences, that it would have been a matter of indescribable significance to me if at least in Dresden my affairs had prospered."

The uncertainty regarding the performance of his opera did not, however, prevent him from writing long letters to Fischer, giving hints, or *Promemoria*, as he calls them, as to the way in which the difficulties of the score are to be overcome. He suggests how the cast should be distributed; begs Fischer to increase the chorus in the church scene by adding the students of the Kreuzschule, if possible; and for the pantomimic scene he does not hesitate to make the bold suggestion that the principal parts must be played by the regular actors of the Dresden Theatre, if justice was to be done to them: all of which suggests the Wagner of later years. He sums up his position in these words: —

"It is above all things of the most unspeakable importance to me that the first performance of my opera should be flawless and as complete in every respect as possible. I have too long deferred to do something for my reputation, and for the sole reason that I considered a poor first performance of a new opera, such as alone could be given at a provincial theatre, as certain death to any work, however great its natural vitality; knowing also that many a promising talent has come to early grief by being compelled to place his works before the world in a mutilated and unrecognizable condition. For eight years — that is, ever since the time when I considered myself prepared to come before the public — I have therefore remained quiet, and have constantly refused every opportunity to have my works brought forward in an incomplete manner; all the more must I now be anxious that this, my first appearance, should be as successful as possible."

The danger of indefinite procrastination, or worse, finally became so great, that he could no longer resist the impulse to return to Germany, to see if his personal presence might not have a beneficial effect. Apart from this he felt an unconquerable desire to see his native

country after five years spent in Russia and France — Riga and Paris. His wife, also, needed the baths at Teplitz; so, after putting the necessary money in his purse by doing some more musical drudgery for Schlesinger, he crossed the Rhine, as was told at the end of the last chapter, and swore his fatherland eternal allegiance.

FIRST PERFORMANCE OF RIENZI

On his return to Dresden, he was warmly welcomed by his friends, and found to his surprise that the preparations for *Rienzi* were going on satisfactorily. The new Opera House had been opened just a year before he left Paris, and it was a happy coincidence that this fine monument of the architect Semper's genius, which was to be the scene of the first performances of *Rienzi*, the *Flying Dutchman*, and *Tannhäuser*, had been inaugurated with Weber's *Euryanthe*, the true root of Wagner's music-dramas. As the rehearsals of *Rienzi* were not to begin till July, Wagner found time to take his wife to the baths at Teplitz. This summer resort in the Bohemian forest always remained one of his favorite refuges. Here he had conceived some years before the plan of *The Novice of Palermo*, and here, on this occasion, he sketched the plot of *Tannhäuser*, with the legend of which he had become acquainted before leaving Paris; and his voyage to Dresden had opportunely taken him through the Thuringian Valley, where he got a glimpse of the lofty Wartburg which forms the scenic background of this opera. This castle he was destined not to see again till seven years later, when his *Tannhäuser* had been completed and performed, and when he was on his way to Switzerland as a political exile, pursued by the police.

It was fortunate for the prospects of *Rienzi* that its composer was at hand to superintend its production; for, as he himself confessed, "the exceedingly elaborate composition required many improvements and alterations" to adapt it to stage requirements. His spare moments he devoted to the versification of an operatic sketch which he had made some years before and which he now offered to Conductor Reissiger, who wanted a new text, and who had a habit — like other unsuccessful operatic composers — of attributing his ill luck to his poor librettos. This sketch was the *Hohe Braut*, based on König's novel, which he had once sent to Scribe. Reissiger, however (with perhaps some reasonable excuse), suspected that what Wagner did not care enough for to use himself, might not be good enough for him either, and so he refused the poem. Unwisely, as it turned out, for a composer of not much better calibre, named Kittl, subsequently set it to music and produced it at Prague under the title *The French before Nice* with considerable success, which the critics attributed largely to its excellent libretto.

Apart from this rebuff by Reissiger, however, Wagner's fortunes had turned completely on his arrival in Dresden. Unlike the management of the Berlin and Paris Operas (as we shall see later on), the Dresden authorities had common sense enough to know that a man who has the genius to compose a grand opera ought to know best how it should be performed. His advice was not repelled, but sought for, and in place of being an obscure, struggling musician, as he was in Paris, he now found himself respected and looked up to as a man of some importance. This change in his situation was accelerated by the fact

that the singers and the players grew more and more enthusiastic over *Rienzi* as they became more familiar with the score. This enthusiasm, of course, soon became a matter of general gossip throughout Dresden, so that expectations regarding the new opera were raised to an unusually high pitch.

Nor were they destined to be disappointed. On the contrary, the success of *Rienzi* was so pronounced, its reception by the audience so brilliant, that Wagner, with one stroke, became the hero of the hour. It is true, he had everything in his favor. The cast included the two best dramatic singers that Germany had at the time — Schroeder-Devrient and Tichatschek — and several others of merit. Reissiger was a good enough conductor for this opera, and his orchestra excellent, while Fischer had seen to it that the chorus was at its best, and Heine had taken care that the numerous costumes, which the management had provided for the occasion with lavish generosity, should be worthy of the performance and the scenic outfit. Yet all this, combined with the enthusiasm of the performers, could not have insured such a brilliant success, had not the opera been made of the right metal to suit the audience that heard its first performance. The impression made on this audience by the hitherto unknown Wagner may best be inferred from the fact that he was not only called before the curtain several times, but that the audience *remained to the end of the opera.* This may seem a dubious compliment, but under the circumstances it was anything but dubious; for *Rienzi,* at its first performance, *horribile dictu,* lasted no less than *six hours,* from six in the evening till close upon midnight. The fourth act of the five did not begin

till ten o'clock — a time when the old-fashioned Germans of that period were accustomed to seek their beds, even after seeing the longest opera ever placed before them; and here were two more acts of a new opera by a new composer to come after that hour!

Wagner himself, in spite of his triumph, was horrified at this unheard-of length of his opera. In reply to Fischer's preliminary objections to the extreme duration of *Rienzi*, which he had calculated at five hours, he had responded that this must be a mistake, as his own calculations made it only about four hours, excluding intermissions. The result showed that Fischer was nearer right than Wagner, who accordingly hastened to the theatre early the next morning to cut up his work mercilessly.

"I did not believe the Intendant would ever repeat the opera," he relates.[1] "After two o'clock I returned to see whether the cuts had been made according to my directions; before that had been done I felt that I could not look any one of the singers or players in the face. But I was accosted with 'Herr Wagner, we are not to make this cut, nor that one.' 'Why not?' I asked. 'Well, Herr Tichatschek was here and said we should not make the cuts.' I laughed. Has Tichatschek gone among my enemies? In the evening I asked him about it. Tears came into his eyes as he replied, 'I shall not permit any cuts; it was too heavenly!'"

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the first performance of *Rienzi* (Oct. 20, 1892) the German papers published a long letter written by Wagner (on Nov. 6, 1845) to friends in Paris, and containing some more details of interest: —

[1] These words are cited by Glasenapp (I. p. 142) from a stenographic report made by Dr. Bierey in Dresden, of Wagner's own narrative in a circle of friends.

"Children, it is true; my opera has had an unprecedented success, and this is the more surprising since it was the Dresden public which gave expression to this success — a public which had never before been in the position to express a first opinion on an important dramatic work. . . . Well, you know about the result of the first performance — therefore no more about it; *it has marked an epoch in the annals of German operatic performances.* The opera has since had its fourth performance, and what is more, — an unheard of event, — always at raised prices and with over-crowded house. . . . What seems most remarkable to me is the patience of the public; I have shortened as much as possible, but still the opera lasts (from six) till half-past ten, and at no performance yet has any one been seen to leave his seat: with the greatest expectation and attention everybody remains to the fall of the last curtain, and that means something in Dresden. When I went about to make cuts I had some curious experiences: the singers said, 'Yes, it is terribly fatiguing,' but no one wanted any cuts: Tichatschek I almost begged on my knees to permit a pruning of his terribly exhausting rôle: impossible! Always his answer was, 'No; for it is too heavenly! It is too heavenly!'"

This opinion seemed to be shared by the public, and the correspondent of the Leipzig *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (Schumann's paper) wrote: "I express my inmost conviction when I say: A pity for every bar that is taken out." To obviate the necessity of mutilating the score the opera was divided into two sections and given on two consecutive nights. Berlioz was among those who heard it (or rather the last three acts) in this form, and in his *Voyage Musical en Allemagne,* he commented favorably on it. Later on it was reduced to five and one-half hours and again given on one evening, always to full houses. Wagner's name was made, but how about his income? In the letter just quoted from, he tells of the rumors that he had received 2000 thaler for *Rienzi.* The truth, how-

ever, was that, after the third performance the Intendant had sent him a flattering letter enclosing 300 thaler ($225), "although," as he said, "the usual honorarium for an opera was only twenty louis d'or" (107 thaler). This was much less than Wagner felt he had a right to expect after "such a fabulous success," and he resolves hereafter not to leave such things to the "generosity" of Intendants, but to make his own terms. Under such circumstances, he writes, his Paris creditors will have to wait, all the more as his older Magdeburg creditors are threatening legal prosecution, and he has some scores to settle at Dresden too. But he has the most sanguine hopes for the future. He longs to meet his Paris friends again: "for you must know, we are still orphaned: in the evenings we sit alone, alone, and no one comes as formerly. Ah! how strange that the most distressful periods of life should leave behind such sweet memories! — Children, we must arrange to meet again! Only wait till my operas bring me a handsome profit; when the creditors [*Gläubiger*] are disposed of, it will be the turn of the believers [*Gläubigen*]."

Intendant Lüttichau was so much pleased with the success of *Rienzi* that he was eager to follow it up at once with a second opera by the same composer. The *Dutchman* score had long been at Berlin, but the performance had been postponed again and again in favor of operas by such men as Lachner. Wagner now asked for his score, but his request was not heeded, whereupon he peremptorily demanded that it should be returned, else he would hold the possessors responsible for consequences. Upon this it was forwarded to Dresden and produced there. But before describing that event we must linger a moment over the plot and the music of *Rienzi*.

THE STORY OF RIENZI

Act I. Scene: a Roman street at night; the church of St. John Lateran in the background, to the right the house of the papal notary Rienzi. The patrician Orsini and his followers place a ladder against Rienzi's house and attempt to abduct his sister Irene, "the most beautiful girl in Rome." While Irene struggles against her captors, a rival patrician faction, the Colonnas, arrive, and fight for her possession. Among them is Colonna's son, Adriano, who is in love with Irene, and who, on recognizing her, immediately fights his way to her side and protects her. Amid the tumult, in which the populace has taken part, Rienzi arrives. He reminds the people of their promise to him to wait for the proper moment to strike, and denounces the patricians for their nefarious conduct. The latter leave to settle their quarrel outside the city gates, and Rienzi is asked by Cardinal Raimondo when he is going to begin the war against the nobles. In reply Rienzi informs him and the people that the moment for attack will be announced by a long-drawn trumpet sound. Rienzi then persuades Adriano to desert his faction and become a true Roman. The lovers are left alone to exchange vows, and apprehensions of evil, when suddenly the fatal sound of the trumpet is heard, first at a distance, then nearer. The day breaks; organ and chorus are heard in the church; the populace assembles and frantically proclaims Rienzi as King of Rome. Rienzi declines to accept any title but that of the people's Tribune; and the act closes with an oath to avenge the crimes of the nobles.

Act II. Scene: a large hall in the Capitol. Messengers of peace arrive and proclaim the victory of the people and their new Tribune over the enemy. Rienzi appears, and the proud patricians are obliged to do homage to him. Left alone, they plot against his life, and Orsini is chosen to assassinate him at the coming festivities. But Adriano has overheard the plot and warns Rienzi. The foreign ambassadors arrive in solemn procession to hand their papers to Rienzi, who astounds them by the bold announcement that henceforth Rome will choose its own King. They remain, however, to witness the festivities, which include a pantomimic representation of the tragedy of Tarquinius and Lucretia, followed by a combat of knights in mediæval costume with Roman warriors. The nobles gradually crowd around Rienzi, and Orsini stabs him, but he is saved by a concealed steel breastplate. For this new outrage all the nobles are condemned to death. But Adriano, assisted by Irene, begs for his father's life, and Rienzi, despite the warning of his friends, pardons all the nobles on their oath of submission.

Act III. Scene: a public square in Rome. Great tumult and ringing of alarm bells. The nobles, having broken their oath, are again offering battle, and the populace wildly clamors for its leader. Rienzi appears on horseback, with Irene and the senators. Adriano once more attempts to hold back Rienzi from exterminating the nobles, offering to effect a reconciliation, but Rienzi sternly refuses. Irene and Adriano are again left alone. When the plebeians return they proclaim Rienzi's fresh victory, and among the bodies brought back is that of Colonna. At sight of it Adriano swears vengeance on

Rienzi for his father's death. A triumphal procession ends the act.

Act IV. Scene: street near the Lateran church. The senators Baroncelli and Cecco lament that the ambassadors, offended by Rienzi's remarks, have left Rome, and that trouble is in sight. Baroncelli accuses Rienzi of treason. His motive in pardoning the nobles, he says, was to become one of their number through the marriage of Irene and Adriano. This accusation is overheard by Adriano, who, seeing his opportunity for revenge, steps forward and asserts that it is true. In the midst of a festive procession, Rienzi now marches to the church. Adriano's intention to murder him is prevented by the presence of Irene, and the conspirators who bar his way are cowed by his manly words. Suddenly, just as Rienzi sets foot on the church steps, a chant of malediction is heard within, and Cardinal Raimondo appears and places the ban of excommunication on him. The nobles have won their cause by an alliance with the all-powerful Church. Rienzi's followers disperse in dismay. Adriano entreats Irene to fly with him; but she repels him and declares she will stay and perish with her brother.

Act V. Scene: a hall in the Capitol. Rienzi's prayer, that his great work may not be thus undone. Irene appears, and he urges her to save herself by going with Adriano; but in vain. Rienzi determines to address the people once more, and leaves. Adriano, goaded to madness by his love and grief, makes one more vain attempt to persuade Irene to go with him. The tumult grows outside, and the scene changes to the open place in front of the capitol. The infuriated populace refuses to listen to Rienzi's words and sets fire to the Capitol. Adriano

sees Irene and Rienzi arm in arm, surrounded by flames, and rushes into the fire the moment the Capitol crashes to the ground, burying him with the others. As the curtain falls, the nobles are seen cutting down the misguided people.

WAGNER'S OPINION OF RIENZI

No creative artist has ever been less trusted by his contemporaries in his opinion of his own works at the time they were written than Richard Wagner; yet we can see to-day that no artist ever had a clearer perception of his strong and his weak points than he. This is conspicuously proved by the judgments he passed on *Rienzi* at various times. The most objective and disinterested critic of to-day could not more definitely point out what is most and what is least satisfactory in this opera than he has done himself.

The reader therefore will doubtless be grateful if, instead of giving my own humble verdict on the opera, I bring to a focus Wagner's own remarks thereon, which are scattered through a dozen of his essays and letters; all the more as I see no reason for differing from any one of these judgments, except that I should place more emphasis than he himself did on the dramatic power and interest of his *Rienzi* poem, which Meyerbeer is said to have declared the best libretto he had ever seen, and which is certainly one of the best constructed and most exciting ones produced up to that time; entirely free from what must be called the versified rot of which most opera librettos are made up, and which induced Voltaire to make his oft-quoted remark that "what is too silly to be spoken is sung." Wagner's whole career as a dramatic

poet may be summed up by saying that it was an attempt to remove this reproach from operatic poetry. And this process began with *Rienzi*, although by no means in the radical manner of his later dramatic poems.

Regarding Wagner's attitude toward his early operas, two opinions have long been current, thanks to persistent misrepresentations based partly on ignorance, partly on malice and dishonesty: one being that he overvalued all his own works, the other that he entirely "repudiated" his early operas, including *Rienzi*, the *Flying Dutchman*, and even *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. Both are equally erroneous. So far was he from overvaluing *Rienzi*, that in the preface to the first volume of his Collected Works he actually apologized for printing the *Rienzi* libretto side by side with his other poems.

> "If in writing this opera-book," he continues, "I had in the least entertained the ambition of being a poet, I think the development of my mind at that time would have enabled me to write sufficiently correct verses, since I had succeeded in this even in an earlier attempt, *The Novice of Palermo*, to such a degree as to win the approval of my quondam friend Laube."

He then goes on to explain that what made him careless in executing the *Rienzi* poem was his daily experience that the public of that time accepted the trashiest librettos in German, or translations from the French, so long as the subject was theatrically effective, or the music particularly good, as in *Jessonda* and *Euryanthe*.

In another place (IV. p. 319) he says that in preparing the text for *Rienzi* he had

> "practically no other thought than that of writing an effective opera libretto. The 'Grand Opera,' with all its scenic and musical splendor, its accumulation of massive effects, musical and emotional,

stood before my eyes; and the aim of my artistic ambition was not only to imitate it, but to surpass all previous examples in reckless extravagance. Nevertheless, I would be unjust to myself were I to name this ambition as the sole motive that guided me in the conception and execution of my *Rienzi*. The subject really inspired me, and I added nothing to my concept that did not have direct reference to the source of this inspiration.[1] . . .

"To the language and versification I gave no more care than seemed to me necessary for securing a good opera text, free from triviality. It was not my aim to write duos and trios; but they seemed to present themselves in this and that place naturally, since I looked at my subject solely through operatic spectacles. So, again, I did not seek in this subject an excuse for a ballet, but with the eyes of an opera composer I espied in it a festival which *Rienzi* had to give to the populace, and in which he would have to place before them a dramatic spectacle from ancient history as a theatrical exhibition; this was the story of Lucretia and the expulsion of the Tarquins connected therewith.

"That this pantomime," he adds in a footnote, "had to be omitted in the theatres where *Rienzi* was given was an annoying disadvantage to me; for the ballet which took its place diverted criticism *from my nobler intentions*, and gave it nothing to see here except an ordinary operatic spectacle."

It is most significant of Wagner's high dramatic mission that even here in *Rienzi*, where he had no thought of reforming the opera, he not only avoided trashy and trivial verses, but sought to replace the ordinary vulgar ballet by a spectacle *logically called for by the situation.*

In a footnote to the preface of Vol. I. he furthermore explains that the text of *Rienzi* is there printed in its original form "as a means of correcting the judgment of

[1] It must be remembered that *Rienzi* was planned as early as the Riga days. Wagner dwells on the pleasure it gave him at that time to forget the worries and cares that were his daily experience in the artistic atmosphere of the grand historic subject which he had chosen for his opera.

those who know the opera only in the mutilated form in which it is now given in the theatres; and who are therefore astonished at the clumsy manner in which the grotesque effects are piled on one another."

All these extracts show that Wagner, without being particularly proud of this early and noisy child of his, nevertheless had a good word for it on occasion. And although he himself frankly pointed out that its music was inspired by, and modelled after, that of Auber, Meyerbeer, and Halévy, he also wrote these words: "However coldly I may look back on my early opera, I must admit this much, that it is pervaded by a youthful, heroic enthusiasm." In the letters to Liszt (1849–1858) there are several references to *Rienzi*, in which he declares that he has no heart to reconstruct this opera, because he has got beyond it; that he values it chiefly as a possible source of income; and that he is willing to let the Parisians try it, even if they bungle it, since it is no longer "a heart-care" of his, and since, after all, it is better suited to Parisian taste than any of the later operas. These remarks show, indeed, that, as I have said, he was not particularly proud of *Rienzi*, but not that he disavowed it entirely, as his opponents always maintained, or that he considered it a "sin of his youth." This misconception — to use a mild epithet — dates from an incident that occurred when Wagner first brought out *Rienzi* in Berlin. It is so characteristic of the tactics of his enemies, and reveals an important trait in his own character so strikingly, that it must be briefly told, partly in his own words.

AN UNDIPLOMATIC SPEECH

At that time (Oct. 26, 1847) Wagner had added the score of *Tannhäuser* to that of the *Flying Dutchman*, and with these two works he had already created a style of his own, which naturally made him look with less favor on the imitative *Rienzi*, with its spectacular pomp, deafening noise, and general operatic shallowness. Unfortunately he never was a good diplomatist. He could not feign the same interest in *Rienzi* that he now felt for the other two operas, and he forgot that, although *his genius* had outgrown his early opera, the same was not true of the general public. But he could not repress his own feelings.

"I always was a bungler in lying," he says. "For example, nothing injured me more than the fact that, conscious of being able to do better things than *Rienzi*, I made a speech to the artists at the dress rehearsal in which I declared the exaggerated demands made on the artists by that opera as an 'artistic sin of my youth.' The reporters immediately dished up this expression before the public and made it feel in regard to this work that, inasmuch as its composer himself had declared it to be a 'thorough failure,' its production before the art-cultivated Berlin public was an impertinence deserving of castigation. Thus my ill success in Berlin was in truth referable more to my badly played rôle as a diplomatist than to the opera itself, which, if I had approached it with full faith in its value and in my eagerness to make it appreciated, might have been as successful as other operas of much less attractiveness that were produced in that city."

MERITS AND DEMERITS OF RIENZI

The reader will now thoroughly understand Wagner's attitude towards this work. His feeling toward it may

have been comparable to that which Schiller must have had in regard to his *Robbers* as compared with his more mature dramas. But *Die Räuber* is still frequently played in Germany, and so is *Rienzi*.[1] Probably it would have disappeared ere this had it not been kept afloat by the grander works from the same pen which followed it; yet it is hardly correct to say that its value to-day is only historic. It has numerous passages which are interesting in themselves, and others because they foreshadow harmonic and orchestral peculiarities of the later Wagner; while the overture, which was written after the whole opera had been completed, is an excellent piece for popular concerts, at which it is always warmly applauded. As ordinarily given, *Rienzi* is tedious, but with a dramatic conductor like Anton Seidl, and in its title-rôle, a Niemann or a Schott, who bring out the dramatic as well as the musical points, it is to this day an entertaining spectacle. Whereas many of its airs are as trivial and light as any admirer of barrel-organ tunes could desire, Rienzi's prayer and several of the finales have a wide melodic sweep and an originality which will for many years preserve their claim to an occasional hearing. There are not a few melodic and dramatic buds — traces of true Wagnerian melos, striking modulations, and telling bits of instrumentation — that were unfolded in his later works, including some distinct prophetic allusions to *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin;* while the effectiveness of the libretto betrays the genuine dramatist — the greatest, from a theatric point of view, that Germany has ever produced.

[1] *Rienzi* had thirty-one performances in Germany during the operatic season 1889–90, and forty during the season 1890–91.

The most serious blemish in *Rienzi* is the assigning of the lover's rôle to a woman, an absurdity which strikes us to-day none the less forcibly, though we bear in mind that in the palmy days of Italian opera this was the regular custom, which reached its climax of idiocy in one of Bellini's operas in which even the typical masculine lover, Romeo, is impersonated by a woman! In those good old times operas were written solely for the singers and the admirers of their vocal skill; and how little the sense of dramatic propriety was developed, is shown most vividly by the fact that such an amorous absurdity could be perpetrated even by Wagner, who was destined soon thereafter to become the creator of the genuine music-drama, in which "the play is the thing," and the vocal and instrumental music merely a means of intensifying the emotions of the *dramatis personæ*.

On listening to Wagner's later music-dramas people often wonder where he got the reputation of being such a noisy composer. But when they hear *Rienzi* with its loud orchestra, enforced by a military band on the stage, its drums and alarm bells, its trumpet calls, and loud vocal parts, they wonder no longer. He got that reputation when *Rienzi* was first produced; and first impressions being hard to efface, it has clung to him ever since. During a performance of *Rienzi* one is inevitably reminded of the Berliner who exclaimed on hearing a military band in the street immediately after witnessing one of Spontini's operas, "Thank Heaven! At last some soft music!"

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

TAPPERT quotes from an interesting letter by Laube to Stage-manager Moritz of the Stuttgart Opera in which these sentences occur: "Would not Wagner's *Rienzi* be something for you? It has proved immensely successful in Dresden and the steam-cars are full of pilgrims who come to see it." So it seems that, with *Rienzi* already began, that custom of making pilgrimages to the cities where Wagner's operas were first or best performed, which continued subsequently in the case of the *Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser* in Dresden; *Lohengrin* in Weimar; *Tristan and Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger* in Munich; and *The Nibelung's Ring* and *Parsifal* in Bayreuth; a custom which marks a distinct innovation in the history of music and is very characteristic of the whole Wagner movement — an eloquent tribute to the novelty and grandeur of these works, which attracted even those who came with the firm determination to be repelled by them.

The success of *Rienzi* was still more emphasized when, after the first few performances, the conductor's bâton was placed in the hands of Wagner himself, who, of course, was much better qualified to bring out the telling points of the score than Reissiger. No wonder that, as already noted, the Intendant Lüttichau was anxious to follow up this success immediately with a production of

Wagner's other untried score. Thus it happened, oddly enough, that, just as the *Flying Dutchman* had been composed within the remarkably short time of seven weeks, immediately after the completion of *Rienzi*, so also was it fated to have its first performance within ten weeks after that of *Rienzi*. Such a sudden change in the fortunes of a composer who had up to that time knocked in vain at innumerable theatre doors, was startling enough: "I who had hitherto been lonely, deserted, homeless, suddenly found myself loved, admired, by many even regarded with wonderment," he exclaims; and the situation naturally threw him into a state of happy elation, and nurtured hopes which, as he found before long, were not to be fulfilled.

"I gladly accepted the offer of the Dresden director," he relates (IV. 399), "and completed the rehearsals in a short time without bothering much about the means of execution. The opera seemed to me infinitely easier to put on the stage than the preceding *Rienzi*, the scenic arrangements more simple and intelligible. The principal male rôle I almost forced on a singer, who had sufficient experience and self-knowledge to feel that he was not equal to his task. The performance was, in its main features, a complete failure. In face of this work the public felt all the less inclined to give the stamp of approval because the style itself of the opera displeased it, since it had expected something very similar to *Rienzi*, and not something entirely opposed to it. My friends were dismayed at this result; they seemed anxious to obliterate this impression on them and the public by an enthusiastic resumption of *Rienzi*. I myself was in sufficiently ill humor to remain silent and to leave the *Flying Dutchman* undefended."

Although the failure of this opera was chiefly owing to the public disappointment in not finding it written *à la Rienzi*, there were other reasons for its non-success.

It had been somewhat hastily and carelessly prepared, and the cast was not of the best, while its new vocal style offered to the singers difficulties of an unwonted kind, and called for histrionic qualities which they did not possess. Schroeder-Devrient alone was satisfactory; "she studied the rôle of Senta, and impersonated it with such a true creative impulse and perfection that her achievement alone saved this opera from being entirely uncomprehended by the public, and even aroused the most demonstrative enthusiasm." But this very circumstance was one of the things which displeased Wagner. He had hoped that his opera would succeed by its own intrinsic merits, whereas now it seemed to be a prima-donna opera, after all; that is, dependent for its success on the art and popularity of a favorite singer — for the time being, at any rate.

Perhaps the *Flying Dutchman* might have been saved even under these circumstances had it been more satisfactorily put on the stage. What Wagner thought of its staging is shown in this extract from a letter to Fischer, written ten years later, and comparing the performance of this opera under his own direction at the small and humble theatre of Zürich with that at the Royal Dresden Theatre: —

"Now more than ever have I realized what a poor performance of this work of mine Dresden gave, inasmuch as I have been forced to acknowledge — without any illusions — that it was possible even in a small provincial theatre like this to bring about a thoroughly efficient, and therefore effective, performance. When I recall what an incredibly awkward and wooden setting of the *Flying Dutchman* the imaginative Dresden machinist, Hänel, put on his magnificent stage, I am even now filled with retrospective rage. Herrn Wächter's and Risse's genial and energetic efforts are also faith-

fully stored in my memory. That I did not succeed, during my six years' royal Capellmeistership, in reviving this opera (with Mitterwurzer, etc.) and getting it respected, can only be understood by one who has some conception of what a Dresden Court Theatre is."

It must be remembered that this was written in 1852. To-day Dresden has the best-managed opera-house in Germany and the best performances of Wagner's operas. Wagner himself heard his *Flying Dutchman* there in 1881, and expressed his special satisfaction with the new scenery and the clever manœuvring of the two ships. But for exactly *twenty years* after its first performances this opera was not heard again in Dresden. It was brought out at Cassel five months after the Dresden *première*, and at Berlin in 1844; then *for exactly ten years thereafter no opera-house at all produced it!* In Vienna it was not heard till 1860, and in Munich and Stuttgart not till 1864 and 1865, and Hamburg till 1870; so slowly did his operas travel at first! But the times have changed. In 1883 both Dresden and Berlin gave their hundredth performance of the *Flying Dutchman;* and during the operatic year 1889–1890 it was given 101 times in the cities of Germany, and in 1890–1891, 129 times: which shows how fifty years after their first production Wagner's early operas are still growing in popularity.

Old people are constantly complaining of the irreverence of our young people of to-day. But if, as the Germans quaintly put it, "the egg considers itself wiser than the hen," is this not because the hen has often acted so foolishly? How could the young Dresdeners who attended the hundredth performance of the *Flying Dutch-*

man in 1883 help feeling a sense of superiority over their benighted ancestors who had so miserably failed to see the poetic and musical beauties of this opera that they actually allowed it to disappear after the fourth performance, and did not insist on hearing it again till twenty years later? Let us first briefly examine this drama and its music, and then see what, apart from the long neglect after its first performances in Dresden, Cassel, and Berlin, was the nature of its reception by contemporary critics and what was the reason of this unjust treatment.

STORY OF THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

The preliminary story of the Flying Dutchman's doom, which forms the "exposition" of the play, is so graphically told in the ballad which Senta sings in the second act that I cannot do better for the reader than quote Mr. J. P. Jackson's translation of it: —

I.

"Yohohoe! Yohohoe! Yohohoe!
Saw ye the ship on the raging deep —
Blood-red the canvas, black the mast?
On board unceasing watch does keep
The vessel's master, pale and ghast!
Hui! How roars the wind! — Yohohoe!
Hui! How bends the mast! — Yohohoe!
Hui! Like an arrow she flies,
Without aim, without goal, without rest!
Yet can the weary man be released from the curse infernal,
Find he on earth a woman who'll pledge him her love eternal.
Ah! Where canst thou, weary seaman, but find her?
Oh, pray to Heaven that she
Unto death may faithful be!

II.

"Once round the Cape he wished to sail
'Gainst 'trary winds and raging seas;
He swore: — 'tho' hell itself prevail,
I'll sail on till eternity!'
Hui! This Satan heard! Yohohoe!
Hui! Took him at his word! Yohohoe!
Hui! And accursed he now sails,
Through the sea, without aim, without rest!
But that the weary man be freed from the curse infernal,
Heaven shall send him an angel to win him glory eternal.
Oh, couldst thou, weary seaman, but find her!
Oh, pray that Heaven may soon
In pity grant him this boon!

III.

"At anchor every seventh year,
A wife to woo he wanders round;
He wooed each seventh year, but ne'er
A faithful woman has he found!
Hui! The sails are set! Yohohoe!
Hui! The anchor's weighed! Yohohoe!
Hui! False the love, false the troth!

* * * * * * *

Thou shalt be freed, yea, through my heart's devotion!
Oh, that God's angel guidance gave him!
Here he shall find my love to save him!"

Act I. The stage represents a wide expanse of ocean. It is dark, and a violent storm is raging. The ship of the Norwegian mariner Daland has just cast anchor near shore, and his sailors are furling up the sails noisily. Daland steps ashore and climbs a rock to reconnoitre. He finds that seven miles more would have taken him safely into his harbor and home; but the storm has

willed that he should not embrace his daughter Senta that evening. Patience is the only remedy, and after setting a watch he goes into his cabin to sleep. The steersman keeps watch a while, sings a song to his sweetheart, and then goes to sleep, too. The storm begins to rage again, and in the distance the Flying Dutchman's ship, with blood-red sails, is seen approaching. Its anchor sinks with a crash, and the Dutchman steps ashore. The seven years are once more over, and once more has he come ashore to search for a woman faithful unto death. He relates in most pathetic accents, intensified by the orchestral discords and sombre coloring, how often he has sought death by plunging into the ocean's depths, by steering the ship against perilous rocks, by exposing his treasures to the greedy eyes of murderous pirates — but all in vain. His expected release through a woman's faith has so often disappointed him that his only hope now is in the Day of Judgment, when all the world will fall to pieces. "Annihilation be my lot" are the last words of his monologue; and "annihilation be our lot" is weirdly re-echoed by the chorus of his doomed companions in the hold of the phantom ship.

Daland reappears on the deck of his ship, discovers the Dutchman's vessel, and chaffs his watchman for falling asleep. He espies the Dutchman and greets him with a seaman's cordiality. The Dutchman invokes his hospitality for a short time, and promises in return a share of his treasures, of which two sailors, at his command, bring ashore a box as a sample. "I have neither wife nor child and never shall I find my home; all my wealth shall be your own, if you will take me to your

hearth." Daland is delighted, and when the Dutchman asks if he has a daughter and is willing to arrange a marriage, he proves no better than most simple-minded, money-loving captains would under the circumstances, and promises that Senta shall be his. The storm, meanwhile, has abated, a favorable wind is blowing, and Daland takes advantage of it and sails ahead, after receiving the Dutchman's promise that he will follow at once.

Act II. shows us a large room in Daland's house. Senta's nurse, Mary, and a number of girls are sitting picturesquely and cosily grouped around the fireplace, spinning and singing a merry chorus. Senta sits apart in a large chair, with her arms folded and gazing dreamily at a picture on the wall representing a pale man with a dark beard and in black attire. The merry song of her companions does not interest her; it jars on her mood, and she scolds them for it. "Very well," they reply, "you sing us something better!" Senta complies and sings the ballad already quoted — the legend of the Flying Dutchman, at whose portrait she has been gazing so long that her soul has been hypnotized into a pitying love of the unhappily immortal mariner. At the conclusion she jumps up from her chair and exclaims, with an ecstatic expression, that *she* will be the woman who is to release him through her faith. While Mary chides her for this folly, and threatens to remove the gloomy picture, Erik, a young huntsman, comes in and announces that Daland will soon be here. Mary and the girls go to prepare a feast for him and the sailors, and Erik is left alone with Senta. He had heard the conclusion of her ballad, and her vow to marry the Dutch-

man, to his great consternation, for he had believed that Senta loved him and would intercede with her father in his behalf, but finds now that she has pity only for the doomed mariner and none for him and his disappointed love.

In despair, he leaves her, still gazing at the picture on the wall. The door opens and in comes Daland accompanied by the Dutchman. At sight of him Senta cannot suppress a shriek of astonishment, and, ignoring her father, she gazes on the guest as if under a spell. Her father chides her for her cold reception, but she has only one thought, — "Father, who is the stranger?" Daland smiles, for this gives him a chance to come to the point at once. "He is a mariner," he explains, "who has won rich treasures in distant lands and now has come to woo for your hand." Then, whispering into her ears that she must win this man, as such a chance will never recur, he leaves them alone to arrange matters. For the first time the Dutchman feels, at sight of this maiden, the real passion of love; and as she was his before he had arrived in person, Daland, on returning, finds them ready to plight their troth.

Act III. Scene: a bay on a rocky coast near Daland's house. In the background, and not far apart, are the ships of the Norwegian and the Dutchman. The former is gaily illuminated and the sailors are having a merry time. In gruesome contrast to this, the phantom ship preserves a deathly silence and is wrapt in unnatural darkness. As the sailors are singing and dancing, a group of girls arrives with baskets full of food and wine. At first they ignore the chaffing of the Norwegian sailors, being intent on serving the Dutchman's crew before

them. But to their calls and offers of refreshment there is no answer: —

> "They do not drink! they do not sing!
> And in their ship there burns no light!"

the Norwegian sailors sing; whereupon they join the girls in a half-mocking, half-terrified invocation of the phantom ship's crew to join their merry-making. Suddenly the sea, while remaining calm everywhere else, begins to rise around the phantom ship; blue flames play on its masts, and the storm wind howls through the cordage. The crew become visible and sing a demoniac chorus, taunting their absent captain with his ill-luck in finding a faithful woman: "Your bride, say, where she remains! Hui, on, to sea again!"

As a boy whistles to overcome his fear in the dark, so the Norwegian sailors at first try to drown the noise of the phantom crew's chorus and the horrible storm which rages around their ship; but as this only intensifies the tumult, they lose heart, make the sign of the cross and leave deck in terror. The phantom crew bursts into coarse, mocking laughter, and in a moment the silence of death again comes over ship, wind, and ocean.

Senta comes out of the house, followed by Erik; both are greatly agitated. Erik, in despair, implores her to reconsider her determination to marry the bridegroom her father has brought. Senta replies that it is her duty, and that she cannot see Erik again; she denies that she has ever pledged her faith to him; whereupon he recalls the time and scene where they stood by the sea, her father having left her in his care; when her arm

was around his neck and the pressure of her hand surely amounted to a confession of love. The Dutchman, unperceived, has approached, and heard this tale. His mind is made up instantly. Ignorant of the depth of her passion, he concludes that she is a mere coquette, who will play with his love as she has played with Erik's. All is lost. "Farewell, Senta!" he exclaims, with a look and tone of terrible despair. She tries to retain him, and reassures him of her love, but he whistles to his crew to weigh the anchor. Then, turning to her once more, he tells her the fate from which he is about to preserve her. *Eternal damnation* is the lot of all who have betrayed him. She, however, shall be saved because she has not yet plighted her faithful love before the altar. He points to his ship whose blood-red sails are being hoisted, and the anchor raised: —

"The oceans of all zones examine, ask the seaman who sails on these oceans: he knows this ship, the terror of the pious: the *Flying Dutchman* I am called!" With these words he has reached his vessel, which immediately sails away. Senta tears herself away from Daland and Erik, runs to a projecting rock, and plunges into the sea. By this act of self-sacrifice the doomed mariner is released. His ship falls into pieces and sinks out of sight, while Senta and the Dutchman rise from the water heavenward, transfigured.

POETIC AND MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

A sad story and a weird one, but admirably adapted for the purposes of a music-drama; and one which, in some form or other, has fascinated poets from the most remote times. The Greek legend of Ulysses in search

of wife and home, and the Christian legend of the wandering Jew are variations of it. Their key-note is the longing for rest after the storms of life — such a longing for home as Wagner felt when Paris had refused him its artistic hospitality. It was this symbolic personal element in the legend which inspired him at the time to such a degree of creative ardor that in composing this opera he produced a new form of the music-drama.

Among the poets and prose-writers who preceded him in the use of his weird mythical subject are Hauff, who wrote a fairy tale of a phantom ship, and Captain Marryat, whose novel of that name is well known. It is not probable that he knew the latter, though he may have borrowed some details from Hauff. The poet to whom he was chiefly indebted was Heine, who, in his *Memoiren des Herrn von Schnabelewopski*, tells about a Flying Dutchman drama given at Amsterdam, in which the doomed mariner is saved by a woman faithful unto death. According to Dr. F. Hueffer, who has made a special study of this matter, it was, however, more probably from an English than from a French source that Heine obtained the outlines of this legend: —

"The two most striking additions to the old story," he says,[1] "in Heine's account of the imaginary performance, are the fact of the Dutchman's taking a wife, and the allusion to a picture. Both these features occur in a play by the late Mr. Fitzball, which at the time of Heine's visit to London (in 1827) was running at the Adelphi Theatre. Adding to this the fact that the German poet conscientiously studied the English stage, nothing seems more likely than that he should have adopted the features alluded to from the English playwright. Here, however, his indebtedness ends. Fitzball knows nothing of the beautiful idea of woman's redeeming

[1] *Richard Wagner* in the "Great Musicians" Series, p. 17.

love. According to him, the Flying Dutchman is the ally of a monster of the deep, seeking for victims. Wagner, further developing Heine's idea, has made the hero himself to symbolize that feeling of unrest and ceaseless struggle which finds its solution in death and forgetfulness alone. The gap in Heine's story he has filled up by an interview of Senta with Eric, her discarded lover, which the Dutchman mistakes for a breach of faith on the part of his wife, till Senta's voluntary death dispels his suspicion." [1]

Wagner, who — contrary to the misrepresentations of his enemies — was always the severest critic of his own works, points out that in the poem of the *Flying Dutchman* there is much that is indefinite; that the dovetailing of the situations is imperfect, the poetic language and verse often devoid of individual traits. I consider this judgment altogether too severe, and I prefer to agree with Liszt that "the arrangement and conception of the text-book betrays in itself a genuine artist, a poet by the grace of God, a hand of which every line, every stroke of the pen, *rises far above the opera texts heretofore known.*" What I have always admired most in this opera is not the weird ballad, or the spinning chorus, or even the storm scenes, in which realism verges on reality, but the quaint, unique, and wonderful responsive choruses in the last act, concerning which Liszt says: —

"The first part of the third act, where the Norwegian women and sailors, gradually overcome by terror, invoke the phantom ship, produces by its versification, as it colors the thought and rhythmically impresses the ear, an effect similar to that given by Bürger's ballads, which fill the heart with a secret tremor. The dialogue is carried on in distiches; each of them adds one more shade to the

[1] Mr. Ellis, the editor of *The Meister* (London, 1892), has written a long article on "A Flying Dutchman Fallacy," in which he disputes Dr. Hueffer's "Fitzball Theory."

fear-filled darkness. The short songs and ballads rank with the best of their kind ever created." [1]

Musically this scene is no less remarkable than it is dramatically. The verses are not only intrinsically musical, but seem to demand the very melodies and harmonies wedded to them. Liszt points out how one of the most gruesome effects is produced. After the girls have invoked the crew of the phantom ship, there is a sudden awful pause in the orchestra, which has been playing in C major. It is broken by a scarcely audible, deep, long-drawn chord of the horns in a key as remote as possible from the preceding one — C sharp minor. This uncanny, ghostly effect is repeated three times, with increasing terribleness. It is one of those numerous passages in the *Flying Dutchman* which betray the born music-dramatist, the *tone* poet, who was to surpass all his predecessors in the emotional realism of his music.

It would be impossible, without writing a special volume on this opera (Liszt has devoted 107 pages to it), to note all the places which would repay comment. I have dwelt on the above passage because it has been ignored by most commentators, who have followed the crowd in heeding chiefly the more lyric parts of the score, including the spinning chorus, the ballad, the steersman's song, etc. Now these are undeniably beautiful pieces — so beautiful that they prove that, if Wagner had chosen to continue writing music of that kind, he would have been second to none. But they are not, after all, the best things in the opera. These are the more dramatic parts — the weird responsive choruses above referred to, the Dutchman's monologue in the first act

[1] Franz Liszt, *Dramaturgische Blätter*, II. p. 234.

(when sung by an artist like Reichmann), the duo between him and Senta in the second act, and especially the storm music of the first and last acts, of which Liszt has given such an eloquent description that those who read French or German can at least feel the emotions inspired by this opera even if they have no opportunity to see or hear it.

It is in considering this *dramatic* side of the *Flying Dutchman* that we can best realize the import of the following sentence penned by Wagner (Vol. I. pp. 2, 3): —

"So far as my knowledge extends, I can discover in the life of no other artist so striking a change, in so short a time, as took place within me between the composition of *Rienzi* and the *Flying Dutchman*, the first of which was hardly ready when the second, too, was almost completed."

Rienzi is simply an *opera* of the old type, in which the plot and the verses exist chiefly for the purpose of enabling the composer and the singers, the scene-painters and stage managers, to dazzle the public with a mosaic of arias, choruses, and all the pomp and glitter of operatic spectacle; whereas the *Flying Dutchman* is a *music-drama*, that is, a piece in which the plot and the action exist for their own sake, while the musician merely colors the situation, as a painter does his sketch. In the old-fashioned operas the singers were expected to preserve merely a very general sort of correspondence between their actions and the music, whereas in the *Flying Dutchman* Wagner, in writing the music, began the method of having in his mind's eye the gesture, action, and facial expression that are to accompany every bar of the singer's part, in harmony with the orchestral part. Even among Wagner's admirers there are many who are

not aware to what an extent this method is employed already in this early work. They should read the ten-page guide to the performance of the *Flying Dutchman* in Vol. V. of his Collected Works. By way of example, he devotes three pages to the *Dutchman's* first scene, beginning as follows: —

"While the trumpets sound their low notes (B minor) at the close of the introduction, he has stepped forward over a plank placed by the sailors between the ship and a rock on shore. The first note of the ritornelle of the aria (the low E sharp of the basses) is accompanied by the first step of the Dutchman on shore; his staggering gait, characteristic of seamen when they first come on shore after a long voyage, is again musically accompanied by the wavy movement of the 'cellos and violas; the first quarter of the third bar coincides with his first step, his arms being always folded and his countenance lowered; the third and fourth steps concur with the notes of the eighth and tenth bars," etc.

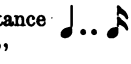
Of course the singer is not expected to follow all these directions slavishly: they are rather intended as hints of the general method; but they throw a flash light on the method itself, which is something new in operatic practice. At the same time it must be borne in mind that the new method is not consistently employed in this opera; there are exceptions — repetitions of verses, and bits of trivial *quasi*-Italian cantilena, both in the vocal and orchestral parts, which characterize the *Flying Dutchman* as a transition opera from the old to the new style; and we shall see later on that *Tannhäuser*, and even *Lohengrin*, bear some marks of this gradual change from the opera to the perfected music-drama.

WAGNER'S OPINION OF THIS OPERA

Among the letters to F. Heine there is one of remarkable interest for the light it throws on this important change in Wagner's artistic method. In it he explains how he was impelled instinctively

"to allow the full fragrance of the old tale to spread itself undisturbed over the whole. Thus only did I believe that I could chain the audience to that rare mood in which, provided one is gifted with some poetic sense, even the gloomiest of legends may win one's affection. So, also, in writing the music, I could not, if I would realize my intentions, look right or left, or make the slightest concession to modern taste, because this would have been both inartistic and unwise. The modern division into arias, duets, finales, etc., I had to give up at once, and in their place relate the legend in one breath, as should be done in a good poem. In this manner I produced an opera of which I cannot comprehend, now that it has been performed, how it could have pleased; since it is, in all its external features, so utterly unlike what is now called an opera, that I can understand how much I asked of the public, — namely, that it should at once put aside all that had hitherto entertained and gratified it in an opera. That this opera, nevertheless, made many friends for itself, not only in Dresden, but especially in Cassel and Riga, and that it won even the favor of the public, appears to me as a finger-sign which points out to us that we must only write just as our inborn German poetic feeling dictates, never making concessions to foreign taste, and simply choosing our subjects and treating them in the manner which most gratifies ourselves, in order to be sure to win the favor of our countrymen. In this manner we may also once more secure an original German operatic style; and all who despair of this and import foreign models, may take an example from this *Dutchman*, which certainly is conceived as no Frenchman or Italian would have ever conceived it."

This letter alone would disprove the absurd notion that Wagner "repudiated" the *Flying Dutchman.* I have already pointed out that he did not even "repudiate" *Rienzi* in the sense of condemning it absolutely; and that he was still farther from such an attitude towards the *Flying Dutchman,* is proved, in addition to the letter just quoted, by the Guide to its correct performance, which he wrote many years later, and by the fact that, in 1852, — nine years after the birth of the opera, — as well as at other times, he systematically revised the score; and in the fifty-ninth letter to Uhlig he explains this process and what led him to do it, ending with this paragraph:

"On the whole, however, this work has again greatly interested me; it has an uncommonly impressive color, most definite in character. It is curious to see how embarrassed I still was at that time in the use of musical declamation; and the operatic style of singing (for instance ) still weighed heavily on my imagination."

The reader will observe with what charming frankness Wagner always notes his own weak points, as well as the strong ones. The same is true of his judgments of other musicians, as we shall see later on; yet his enemies succeeded in making the whole world believe that he overrated his own works and abused all the great composers of the past. To these critics we must now attend for a moment.

CRITICAL PHILISTINES[1] AND PROPHETS

When Wagner triumphantly called Ferdinand Heine's attention to the favor his new opera had won with the

[1] What is a Philistine? Wagner, in his letters, constantly applies this term to his enemies, and it is well known that Schumann conceived

public, and based thereon hopes for the future of a new style of German opera, he took time by the forelock — very much so. It was, indeed, applauded at Dresden, and its author called before the curtain; it was also given at Cassel, at Riga, and at Berlin; but everywhere, after a few performances, it disappeared from the stage, not to be revived for a decade at any German theatre. The public evidently found it too much of a monochrome — too much of the same gloomy color from beginning to end, and too void of the usual operatic tinsel. But it was not the public that was to blame most for Wagner's disappointment in his hopes of being appreciated at once as the creator of a new style of German opera. The critics were at fault. What is the highest, the most important function of musical criticism? Surely not to chronicle the details of each night's performance, but to recognize genius in its germs and to foster its growth in every possible way. But the Ger-

it to be so much of the mission of his life to combat pedantry and conservative prejudice in music, that he gave to many of his critical articles a semi-fictitious form, representing them as the opinions of several individuals who, together, represented the cause of David against the Philistines and were called *Davidsbündler*. In English literature the term Philistinism was first formally introduced by Matthew Arnold, in his essay on Heine, where he defines it as "inaccessibility to new ideas," and says: "Philistinism must have originally meant, in the mind of those who invented the nickname, a strong, dogged, unenlightened opponent of the chosen people, of the people of the light. The party of change, the would-be remodellers of the old traditional European order, the invokers of reason against custom, the representatives of the modern spirit in every sphere where it is applicable, regarded themselves, with the robust self-confidence natural to reformers, as a chosen people, as children of light. They regarded their adversaries as humdrum people, slaves to routine, enemies to light; stupid and oppressive, but at the same time very strong." Fétis of Paris, Dr. Hanslick in Vienna, and Mr. Joseph Bennett in London, are what the Germans would call *Prachtexemplare* of the Philistine.

man critics, with a few honorable exceptions, did exactly the opposite. They abused Wagner, told lies about him and his works, and did all in their power to humbug the public, until, after many years, the public refused to be humbugged any longer and compelled the unwilling critics to capitulate before *its* judgment — to *follow* it, instead of *leading* it, as they should have done.

The opposition began with *Rienzi*, although in that case it was less violent than subsequently, as *Rienzi*, being cut after the fashionable operatic pattern, did not appear to the critics to be in such "bad form" as the later operas, which followed Nature instead of Fashion. Yet even *Rienzi* had its enemies, especially in Berlin, the centre of German intelligence and wit. A specimen of this "wit" is preserved in the *Musikalisch Kritisches Repertorium* for 1844, where a "bright and clever connoisseur" is quoted as saying of *Rienzi*, "one step further and there will be no more music." Another wit varied this joke by calling *Rienzi* "an opera without music." Still another funny Berliner wrote to the Leipzig *Signale:* "At first, people crowded to *Rienzi*, now they have to be driven there by the police! It has been suggested to send the Polish captives to *Rienzi*. Mieroslawsky is said to have turned pale with terror when he heard of this." A correspondent of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* ends a favorable report of the *Rienzi* performance in Berlin with these words: —

"Nevertheless I fear the opera will not long remain in the repertory; for *all the critics are up in arms against it*, the Intendant is not friendly to Wagner, the King, at whose command the opera was given, has not yet seen it, Meyerbeer left the city in great haste," etc.

It might be said that *Rienzi* partly deserved this fate, but it must be remembered that at that time its weaknesses were not as patent as they are now. The *Flying Dutchman*, which certainly did not merit such treatment, fared even worse. The *Signale* had this notice from Dresden: "Richard Wagner's second opera has also created a *furore* at its first performance; all the papers agree in this. To us somebody has written that it is the most tedious thing he has ever heard." Herr Tappert surmises that this "somebody" was a man named Schladabach who, it seems, had a sort of monopoly for supplying all outside papers with news about musical matters in Dresden — always hostile to Wagner, when he was concerned. This may be true, but the foolish and malicious Schladabach soon found numerous imitators and allies in all parts of Germany — and out of Germany. "I hear everywhere complaints about the lack of agreeable melodies that can be retained in the memory, and about the too heavy orchestration," writes a correspondent of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* — a complaint at which every schoolboy will smile to-day. The Leipzig *Signale*, at that time a leading musical paper, sums up the Cassel performance in two lines: "Wagner's latest opera, the *Flying Dutchman*, has been given at Cassel. Two imposing ships, which sailed across the stage with marvellous ease, created great enthusiasm." Of the drama and the music not a word! When the overture was first performed in Milan, a local paper called it "an infernal racket"; and a French critic, Fiorentino, was actually made "seasick" by it! But all this seems mild compared to the gentlemanly remarks of a writer in the London *Musical World* more than a decade later.

"This man, this Wagner, this author of *Tannhäuser*, of *Lohengrin*, and so many other hideous things, — and, above all, the overture to *Der Fliegende Hollaender*, the most hideous and detestable of the whole, — this preacher of the 'Future,' was born to feed spiders with flies, not to make happy the heart of man with beautiful melody and harmony. What is music to him or he to music? His rude attacks on absolute melody may be symbolized as matricide. . . . Who are the men that go about as his apostles? Men like Liszt, madmen, enemies of music to the knife, who, not born for music, and conscious of their impotence, revenge themselves by endeavoring to annihilate it," etc., etc.

In Vienna, always a chief seat of critical Philistinism, — in Vienna, where Schubert was allowed to die so poor that his brother had to pay the funeral expenses, and where Mozart was so greatly "assisted" by the critics that he had to be buried in a pauper's grave, which does not exist any more, — in Vienna, the leading critic, long since professor of musical history at the University, — Dr. E. Hanslick, — wrote, as late as 1859, regarding the *Flying Dutchman:* "Wherever, in this opera, the descriptive element does not prevail, where it ceases to be 'marine' and begins to be music, Wagner's weakness stands fully revealed: his poverty of invention, and his amateurish method." Does not the spinning song, one of the most universally popular melodies ever composed, afford a striking proof of the professor's acumen! It is in a Vienna paper, too, that we come across one of the first Wagner Prophets. In the *Allgemeine Weiner Musikzeitung* of 1843 there is a review of the musical season in Dresden, in which this sentence occurs: "Wagner's operas have proved successful, but will in all probability not remain on the stage long." Quite so. That was in 1843, and in 1890–1891 these two operas had 169

performances in Germany and Austria. True, fifty years can hardly be considered "long," when we remember that nineteen of every twenty operas live only a year or two, while of all operas ever composed hardly a dozen have survived a century.

It will be remembered that when Wagner sent his *Dutchman* score to the Royal Opera at Munich, before he left Paris, it was returned to him with the answer that it was "not adapted to German taste." Munich actually waited more than twenty years — till 1864 — before it brought out this opera, and then not till King Ludwig had commanded its production. Once placed before the public, it soon became so popular that, a few years ago, it reached its hundredth performance there, in spite of the severity of the critics, one of whom wrote after the first performance that "the second act saved what the first or third had spoiled!"

An amusing reminiscence of the first Paris episode in Wagner's life may be found in Felix Clément's *Dictionnaire des Opéras, à propos* of the same opera. Speaking of Dietsch's music to Wagner's sketch, he remarks, "the legend which furnished the subject of this work is so *bizarre* that the public could not accept it. Justice was nevertheless rendered to the music." How is it, M. Clément, that the *Vaisseau Fantome*, with Dietsch's music, disappeared *forever* after a dozen performances, while with Wagner's music it still has almost a hundred and fifty performances a year in Germany alone? We shall meet some of our brilliant Critical Philistines again in later chapters, and also the Wagner Prophets, who, as we all know, are still "at it" predicting his speedy collapse in spite of half a century of dis-

appointments! It has been truly said that man is a "reasoning animal." He always learns by experience!

BERLIOZ, CORNELIUS, LISZT, AND SPOHR

Schumann, in one of his fits of disgust at the inability of the German Critical Philistines to recognize the genius of Chopin, exclaims that *criticism always lags behind unless it emanates from creative minds.* The whole history of Wagnerism is proof of this. With few exceptions, the small fry of criticism were bitterly opposed to it, while its first powerful champions were men of creative genius — Spohr, Liszt, Cornelius, Franz, Raff, and others. Berlioz was one of the first men of genius who heard the *Flying Dutchman*, and while finding some things to criticise in it, he wrote that "it appeared to me remarkable for its sombre coloring and certain stormy effects perfectly justified by the subject." Another composer, whose operas are only just beginning to win their merited popularity, Peter Cornelius, — who was himself one of the most pitiable victims of Critical Philistinism which allowed him to die under persecution and with few to recognize his merits, except Liszt, — wrote of the *Flying Dutchman* that it was the first opera of which the poetry and the music were conceived at the same time, each conditioning, limiting, and stimulating the other, thus producing a higher ideal union.

Liszt's opinion of the *Flying Dutchman* is already known to the reader. One more of the critical gems scattered through his 107-page essay on this opera may, however, be quoted. Of the overture, which our British Philistine found so "hideous and detestable," Liszt says: "One feels tempted to exclaim, as in looking at Preller's

marine pictures, 'It is wet!' One scents the salt breeze in the air. . . . One cannot escape the impressiveness of this ocean-music. In rich, picturesque details it must be placed on a level with the best canvases of the greatest marine painters. No one has ever created a more masterly orchestral picture. Without hesitation it must be placed high above all analogous attempts that are to be found in other musico-dramatic works" — including Mozart's *Idomeneo*, concerning which the reader will find some instructive remarks in this essay of Liszt's.

But it was not only representatives of the "new school" that found delight and merit in Wagner's opera. The very first composer who appreciated it was a gentleman of the "old school," the venerable Spohr. At the age of sixty-nine, when most artists — especially musicians — are deaf to new impressions, he heard the *Dutchman* at Dresden; and how much he was impressed by it may be inferred from the fact that he was the first (after Dresden) to bring it out (at Cassel), only five months after its *première*. We read in his Autobiography (Vol. II. p. 271) how, after perusing the text of this opera, he declared it "a little masterpiece," and regretted "not having had, ten years previously, a similar and equally good one for my own composition." To his friend Lüder, whom he invited to the performance, he wrote: —

"This work, although it comes near the boundary of the new-romantic school *à la* Berlioz, and is giving me unheard-of trouble with its immense difficulties,[1] yet interests me in the highest degree since it is obviously *the product of pure inspiration*, and does not,

[1] This sounds amusing to-day. What would Spohr have said to *Tristan* or the *Götterdämmerung!* The italics in this extract are my own. Critics and professors will please heed them.

like so much of our modern operatic music, betray in every bar the striving to make a sensation or to please. There is much creative imagination in it, its invention is thoroughly noble, and it is *well written for the voices*, while the orchestral part, though enormously difficult, and somewhat overladen, is rich in new effects and will certainly, in our large theatre, be perfectly clear and intelligible. At the end of this week the rehearsals will begin in the theatre, and my curiosity is greatly aroused as to how the fantastic subject, and the still more fantastic music, will impress me on the stage. In so far I think my judgment is already clearly fixed, that I consider Wagner as the most gifted dramatic composer of the time. His aims in this work are at any rate noble, and that tells in these times where everything seems to be calculated to produce a sensation or to tickle the ears of the vulgar."

Now we all know that Wagner was ever a most ungrateful wretch — for have we not been told so a thousand times? What did he do after these demonstrations of friendship on the part of Spohr, who, besides, wrote to Wagner — who had never even asked him to bring out his opera — a letter in which he expressed his pleasure at coming across a young composer who showed in everything he did that he took a serious view of art? In reply to all this, what did Wagner do when he heard that his opera had been well given and favorably received? He wrote Spohr an enthusiastic letter of thanks in which he congratulated himself on having found in the venerable master a champion who took hold of his cause with such superior intelligence, energy, and good will; adding that these qualities in a conductor were even more important to the success of an opera than the best singers. And in 1859, when Wagner heard of Spohr's death, he added insult to injury by writing a eulogy of him in which he lamented the "rich endowment, power, and noble pro-

ductivity" that had passed away with one who was "the last of those noble, serious musicians whose youth was still illuminated by the direct rays of Mozart's sun."

"He was a serious, honest master of his art; the maxim of his life was belief in his art; and his keenest enjoyment sprang from the strength of this faith. This serious faith made him free from every personal pettiness; whatever was unintelligible to him, he left alone as foreign to his nature, without opposition or persecution. That was the so-called 'coldness and inaffability' with which he was often reproached." (See Vol. V. p. 135, etc.)

If the reader is a pessimist by nature, he will perhaps reply that this eulogy of Spohr was merely written by way of retaliation for the services rendered him by that master. But if he will read on, he will discover in our very next chapter what Wagner thought of, and did for, four great masters who were either dead when he was born, or died while he was a child, — Bach, Gluck, Weber, and Beethoven.

WHAT BEETHOVEN WOULD HAVE SAID

Beethoven died when Wagner was fourteen; indeed, it was the news of Beethoven's death that first called Wagner's attention to his music, of which he subsequently became such a fanatical admirer and champion that, as we have seen, Heine remarked of him jocularly that he even had "friend of Beethoven" printed on his visiting-card. Would Beethoven have returned this admiration? Would he, for example, have approved of the wild and dissonant storm music which makes up such a great part of the *Flying Dutchman* score? I say boldly that he would; and I base this assertion on the attitude

which he assumed toward Weber's *Freischütz*, which, with its gruesome Wolf's-Glen music, was at first considered very "Wagnerian" (so to speak) by the critics, one of them, the poet Tieck, going so far as to declare it "the most unmusical noise that ever raged on a stage." What Beethoven thought of these "Wagnerian" scenes in the *Freischütz* may be read in Max Maria von Weber's admirable biography of his father (Vol. II. p. 509): —

"'The profound originality, which of course did not escape him, made a deep impression on him, and he exclaimed in presence of his friends, striking the score with his fist: 'The usually so gentle little man, — I should not have considered him capable of such a thing! Weber must now write operas, nothing but operas, one after the other, and without many scruples. That Caspar, the monster, stands there like a house. Wherever the devil puts in his paws, we are sure to feel them.' And when somebody recalled the second finale, and the musically unheard-of things therein, he exclaimed: 'Yes, that is quite so; but the effect on me is absurd. I can see of course what Weber is after, but he certainly has written devilish stuff here. When I *read* it, — as at the Wild Hunt, — I have to laugh, and yet I feel that it is the right thing, — *und es wird doch das Rechte sein!*' And deeply agitated, he added, 'Such a thing must be heard — *only heard*, but as — I —'"

Poor deaf Beethoven! But the critics — who had no lack of ears — what did they do for Weber, next to Wagner the greatest dramatic composer Germany has produced? Instead of conscientiously studying the score of his immortal *Euryanthe* and explaining its beauties to the public, they dubbed it *Ennyanthe*, and attacked it so savagely that it proved a financial failure; and poor Weber, who was ill with consumption, had to accept an offer, against his conscience, to write an opera for London in order to leave a small sum for his family after death.

He knew it would kill him — and it did; but the critics had had their joke about *Ennyanthe*, and the public its laugh, and that was, of course, the main thing. Subsequently *Euryanthe* was recognized as a great masterwork. Did this teach the critics a lesson? or did any one of them have the humility of Beethoven, to exclaim, when anything struck him as "devilish stuff": "and yet it must be the right thing"? The answer will be found in this book, *passim;* for the critical farce, like history, repeats itself after the appearance of each new opera by Wagner, without exception.

WAGNER AS ROYAL CONDUCTOR

It was with Weber's *Euryanthe* that the new opera-house in Dresden had been opened on April 12, 1841; and it was with the same opera that Wagner chose to be tried as an applicant for the position of royal conductor, on Jan. 10, 1843. It seemed as if, with his return to Dresden, fortune had begun to smile on him perpetually. Not only was his *Rienzi* brought out, and triumphantly successful; not only was this immediately followed by the demand for the *Flying Dutchman;* but it happened most opportunely that just about this time two men who were associated with Reissiger in supervising the performances at the Royal Opera, Morlacchi and Rastrelli, died in rapid succession. Now, since Wagner had not only become the hero of the day with his two operas, but had shown his rare ability as a conductor in presiding over their rehearsals and public performances, what more natural than that he should be looked upon as a proper and desirable colleague to Reissiger?

Strange as it may seem, he did not at once embrace this plan with the eagerness that might have been expected. He remembered his toilsome and tiresome experiences as conductor at Magdeburg, Königsberg, and Riga, followed by his disappointments regarding operatic affairs in Paris. He knew that he would have to spend his days and nights in preparing and conducting operas

most of which he detested for their lack of artistic value and shallow brilliancy; and in his secret heart he may have shared the belief of a Dresden correspondent that it was not desirable to make a man of his creative capacity waste his time in rehearsing operas. His friends, however, could not appreciate such reasons; and, yielding to their advice and to the natural desire of his wife to have at last a regular and respectable income, he made up his mind to try for the vacant place.

"There were many applicants besides Wagner. As possible successors to Morlacchi only Gläser and Wagner were taken into consideration. The former wished to have the same rank as Reissiger, while the composer of *Rienzi* at first appeared to be satisfied with the title of music-director and a salary of 1200 thaler ($900). The Intendant von Lüttichau recommended him urgently. Wagner afterwards produced weighty considerations with which he succeeded in securing an appointment to a full Kapellmeistership,[1] at a salary of $1125."

Almost a year had elapsed between Wagner's arrival in Dresden and his appointment as Royal Conductor. For six years he occupied that position, and the most important artistic fruits of this period were the scores of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, the first of which was performed on Oct. 19, 1845, while *Lohengrin* was reserved for a different fate. But before considering these two operas it will be well to dwell on some minor compositions of this period, and on Wagner's activity as a conductor.

[1] This version of the affair, given by Tappert (p. 24), differs somewhat from Glasenapp's (Vol. I. pp. 150–154).

THE LOVEFEAST OF THE APOSTLES

After overcoming the scruples which he had at first entertained in regard to a resumption of theatrical life, he entered on his duties with joy and pleasant anticipations of the fine performances he would be able to give with the excellent artists then gathered at the Dresden Opera, and also in the concert rooms. He was installed on Feb. 2, and his first official act was to assist Berlioz at the rehearsals for the concerts he was about to give in Dresden — "which he did with zeal and the greatest good-will," — *avec zèle et de très bon cœur*, — as Berlioz himself wrote at the time;[1] adding that Wagner was "a young artist of precious endowments. R. Wagner, besides his twofold talent as man of letters and composer, possesses also that of an orchestral conductor. I have seen him conduct his operas with rare precision and energy."

Although the duties of a royal Kapellmeister might have seemed sufficiently arduous, since there were three or four operas to be rehearsed and performed each week by the two conductors, Wagner still found time to engage in various concert enterprises. He accepted the leadership of the Liedertafel, a vocal society presided over by Dr. Löwe; and for a festival that was to be given in the summer of 1843 he composed the *Love Feast of the Apostles*, a biblical scene for three choirs of male voices and orchestra. Wagner rarely was at his best when he wrote for the concert hall, and this piece is no exception

[1] How shamefully he requited this service in 1861, when Wagner so greatly needed a friend in Paris, we shall see in a later chapter.

to the rule. Its especial significance lies in the originality of its conception and the manner in which the born opera-composer is revealed even in a concert piece like this. For more than half an hour the apostles, dejected by the Saviour's death, sing alone, without accompaniment, when suddenly, with the words of the apostles, "What murmuring fills the air? What sounds, what strains?" the orchestra comes in and illustrates the words with a most thrilling effect. Nor was this the only theatrical effect. Another one, quite as remarkable, which was, many years later, adopted in *Parsifal*, was the placing of forty select voices in the lofty cupola of the church, which produced a magic impression on every one — except, of course, the critics, one of whom asserted that Wagner could not even write grammatically correct music (he was at that time at work on *Tannhäuser!*) and that if his teacher Weinlig (to whose widow this composition was dedicated), could have heard it, he would have turned in his grave![1]

WEBER'S REMAINS TRANSFERRED TO DRESDEN

In securing Wagner as its leader, the Liedertafel not only got hold of the best conductor it could have found

[1] More detailed descriptions of this composition may be found in Hanslick's *Aus dem Concertsaal*, p. 314, and Noufflard's *R. Wagner*, p. 172. That Wagner, in 1852, thought well of this work is indicated by this passage in a letter to Liszt: "It is really incomprehensible to me that our numerous vocal societies have not yet produced my *Love Feast of the Apostles*. . . . In a large hall and with a large chorus, you can easily leave the instrumentation as it is. Only let me call your attention to the fact that I was compelled, in Dresden, after certain main divisions of the work, to indicate the pitch again by means of *two harps* · the larger a chorus, the more inevitably it flattens from time to time."

in Germany, but gained a most ardent champion for a cause which it had much at heart; namely, the project of transferring the ashes of Weber from London to Paris. A traveller had reported that the plain coffin which contained Weber's remains had been stored in such a careless way in the vaults of St. Paul's, that there was danger that it might before long be unrecognizable. This aroused a project in Germany to reclaim the coffin and bury it in German soil. Several concerts had been given, one by the Liedertafel, but the necessary funds had grown so slowly that there was danger that the project would have to be abandoned. Wagner's appointment to a leading musical position brought new hopes. It was known that he was an almost fanatic admirer of Weber, who would be sure to throw his whole soul into the undertaking, and so he did. The first thing to be done was to secure a performance at the Opera for the benefit of the scheme; but peculiar difficulties stood in the way. At first it was given out that the King felt religious objections to such a disturbance of the dead; then the royal director, von Lüttichau, tried to persuade Wagner of the impracticability of the scheme. Why should Weber, in particular, be honored in this manner? Given such a precedent, would not the widows of other royal conductors, of Morlacchi or Reissiger, be justified some day in bringing similar claims? Wagner's attempt to make clear the difference between these cases was perhaps less decisive than the argument that other opera-houses had given such benefit performances, including one under Meyerbeer at Berlin, which netted 2000 thalers, and that it would therefore be disgraceful for Dresden not to do the same honor to its own great former Kapell-

meister. This had its proper effect; and with the funds derived from these performances, Weber's oldest son could at last be sent to London to bring over the coffin.

He returned with it on Dec. 14, 1844, and the Germans, according to their usual custom, tried to atone by their homage to the dead for the neglect and vituperation which alone they have for a living genius. A grand torchlight procession was arranged, followed by the relations and friends of Weber, by members of musical societies, and a vast crowd of spectators. The funeral march for the occasion had been arranged by Wagner from two *Euryanthe* motives for eighty wind-instruments. The weird tremolos of the violas in the thrilling tomb-motive he arranged for twenty muted drums playing pianissimo; and the effect of the whole was so impressive, so appropriate, and peculiarly reminiscent of Weber, that Schroeder-Devrient, who had known him personally, declared she had never witnessed a ceremony in which the means were so successfully adapted to the end; and other witnesses who had watched the procession from their windows, declared to Wagner that the effect was grand beyond expression. Thus did Wagner manifest his dramatic genius in life as in art; and in order that this real ceremony might not be less impressive and perfect than a stage performance, he made the musicians learn their parts by marching across the stage at the last rehearsal.

When the coffin arrived at the chapel of the Catholic cemetery, Schroeder-Devrient placed a wreath on it, and Wagner delivered a funeral address. Weber's poor widow had just lost her youngest son, aged twenty. Wagner made a pathetic allusion to him as having been

fated to convey to the manes of his father the message of his countrymen's love, and then continued: —

"So the Englishman now does you justice, the Frenchman admires you, but the German alone can *love* you; you are his own, a beautiful day from his life, a warm drop of his blood, a piece of his heart; who shall blame us if we wished that your ashes, too, should be a part of the dear German soil? Never has there been a more *German* musician than you. Wherever your genius bore you, into whatever distant, bottomless realm of fancy, always still did it remain chained with a thousand fibres to the heart of the German people, with which he wept and laughed, like a credulous child when it listens to the legends of fairy tales of home."

This was the first public address that Wagner ever made, and the only one in which he did not speak extempore. He relates[1] a curious psychologic phenomenon which occurred during its delivery: —

"As I was completely filled with my subject and the way I intended to treat it, I felt so sure of my memory that I had taken no precautions for an accident, whereby I gave my brother Albert, who stood near me, a moment of great perplexity, as he confessed that, deeply impressed as he was, he could not help confounding me for not giving him the manuscript to prompt with. For it happened that, after I had begun my speech with a distinct and full voice, I was for a moment so strongly affected by the almost startling effect which my own voice, its sound and accents, made on me, that, as in a trance, I imagined that I not only *heard* but *saw* myself, facing the silent audience; and by thus placing myself as an object before myself I assumed a state of intense expectation of what was to come, just as if I were not the same man that stood there as speaker. No fright or aberration of attention accompanied this state; only there was such a disproportionately long pause that whoever saw me musing with absent stare could not know what to think of me. At last my silence and the breathless

[1] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II. pp. 59, 60.

stillness about me recalled me to the fact that I was there to speak and not to listen; immediately I proceeded and spoke my address to the end so fluently that the famous actor, Emil Devrient, assured me subsequently that he had been marvellously impressed, not only as a spectator of the touching funeral ceremonies, but also, and especially, in his capacity as a dramatic orator."

The ceremonies were brought to a close by the singing of a poem especially written and composed for the occasion by Wagner. Nor did his efforts cease here. Having brought back Weber, it remained to build him a worthy monument, for which a place had been selected near the opera-house. If the reader will look over the second and third letters of the Wagner-Liszt correspondence, he will find that they are eloquent appeals for the assistance, in this matter, of the generous pianist, through whose efforts, mainly, the Beethoven monument had first been made possible.

A SURPRISING BEETHOVEN PERFORMANCE

Half a century ago subscription concerts were not so customary in German cities as they are now. Besides playing at the opera and in the church, the royal orchestra of Dresden gave a public performance only once a year, for the benefit of the widows and orphans of former members. It was customary on these occasions to produce an oratorio and a symphony, which were conducted in rotation by the two Kapellmeisters. For the concert in 1846 Reissiger had charge of the oratorio, while the symphony was in the hands of Wagner, who selected Beethoven's Ninth. Thereat great consternation among the members of the orchestra, who were so alarmed that they actually sent a deputation to General-

Director von Lüttichau, begging him to use his authority in preventing Wagner from carrying out his nefarious and reckless plan!

But what was there so very alarming in Wagner's decision to perform Beethoven's Ninth Symphony? The answer to his question throws a brilliant light on the taste and actions of the kind of musicians, conductors, and critics who at that time, as later, were Wagner's determined enemies.

At that time the conservatives among the professional musicians had not yet succeeded in understanding the "real Beethoven"; that is, the compositions of his third period. These works, which are now considered the grandest of all, were then pronounced obscure, unnatural, the aberrations of a mind hampered by deafness. The trouble, as usual, was not in the music, but in the interpreters, who did not understand Beethoven's intentions and his novel way of expressing them, which is now known as his "third style," and of which the Ninth Symphony is the finest example. This symphony was at that time very rarely given in Germany. Reissiger had produced it in Dresden some years previously to the events we are now considering, but it failed to give satisfaction to the audience — or the conductor. Consequently the symphony was in bad odor, and the musicians feared that if it were given at their "Pensionsconcert," the widows and orphans would go empty-handed.

Wagner knew better. He had once as a youth heard this symphony at a Gewandhaus concert in Leipzig and was surprised to find so little in it compared to what he had expected from the score, with which he was even

then thoroughly familiar (the reader will remember that when he was seventeen he offered an arrangement of it for the piano to a publisher); in Paris, however, he heard it under Habeneck, who had compelled his musicians to rehearse it over and over again until they thoroughly understood it: consequently the audience understood it too, and it proved a great success. Convinced, therefore, that, if Beethoven's greatest work was unpopular in Dresden, this was simply the fault of its misinterpreters, Wagner resolved to remedy this state of affairs, and to reveal Beethoven's genius in its true light. So he stubbornly refused to modify his plan; but in order to avert the possibility of a small audience, he aroused the curiosity of the public by various notices which he inserted in the newspapers anonymously. Then he wrote and printed a sketch which later became the basis of his famous ten-page "Programme" for this symphony, in which he analyzes the sentiments expressed in it, partly by means of apposite verses happily chosen from Goethe's *Faust*.[1] His next step was to borrow the orchestral parts in Leipzig, as the Dresden orchestra did not wish to bear the expense of buying them. Regardless of expense, he insisted, however, in carrying out his intention of making some changes in the concert hall, to facilitate a rearrangement of the orchestra by which it was concentrated in the centre, while the chorus surrounded it in seats rising amphitheatrically around it, whereby the vocal music was rendered more effectively, and all the sounds were better blended.

Then the rehearsals began. With what thoroughness and perseverance they were carried out may be inferred

[1] This programme is reprinted in Vol. V. of the *Gesammelte Schriften*.

from this one fact that there were no fewer than twelve special meetings of the contrabasses and 'cellos, for the unique recitative at the beginning of the last movement, which was repeated until the musicians succeeded in combining the greatest freedom and energy with the deepest sentiment and expression. The choruses were rehearsed with the same zeal until his own leading voice could no longer be heard in the enthusiastic volume of sound. Into the orchestral parts he wrote the expression marks with his own hand.

For all their pains Wagner and his musicians were most liberally rewarded. Already at the final rehearsal the hall was full, and the sum netted reached the unprecedented figure of more than 2000 thalers; the directors confessed themselves converted, and to make sure of a similar income, requested Wagner annually, as long as he remained in Dresden, to repeat the Ninth Symphony at their Pensionsconcert. The eminent Danish composer, Niels Gade, assured Wagner that he would gladly pay twice the admission price merely to hear that recitative of the basses once more; and the philologist, Dr. Köchly, told him that he had been able for the first time to follow a symphony from beginning to end with sympathetic understanding. And how about our friends, the critical clowns? They cut their usual capers, as a matter of course, and one of them wrote that the performance was poor — excepting the choruses, which were good because they had been trained by Court-organist Schneider! This was a lie, — Schneider had not trained the chorus, — but a critical lie *in re* Wagner is hardly a phenomenon that calls for comment.

Reissiger, fearing that Wagner would succeed where

he had failed, had gone so far as to actually *intrigue against the Symphony*, and to point out "Beethoven's regrettable aberrations." And Wagner, the notorious "enemy" of all the great composers, what did he think of this "regrettable aberration"?

"It is not possible," he writes, "that the work of a master can ever have taken possession of a pupil's heart with such magic power as that which overwhelmed me when perusing the first movement of this symphony. Had anybody surprised me before the open score, as I went over it to consider the means of its execution, and noted my tears and frantic sobs, he would truly have asked himself in astonishment if this was the conduct of a royal Saxon Kapellmeister! Fortunately I was on such occasions spared the visits of our orchestral directors and their revered first Kapellmeister, and other gentlemen versed in classical music."

UHLIG, BACH, PALESTRINA

Among those who attended this historic performance of the Ninth Symphony were two young men, one of whom subsequently became one of the most able Wagner conductors, and the other one of the greatest Wagner singers — Hans von Bülow and Schnorr von Carolsfeld.[1] Among the number of those who were converted on this occasion to Wagner's cause was also Theodor Uhlig, who subsequently became the valued assistant, friend, and champion of the exiled composer, and to whom the lion's share of the *Letters to Dresden Friends* are addressed. Uhlig was himself a composer, who, in his early youth, wrote almost a hundred vocal and instrumental pieces. He was at first a decided opponent of Wagner, and even wrote a musical burlesque of his

[1] Glasenapp, I. 218.

style; but on hearing him conduct the Ninth Symphony, he realized what injustice he had done him, and in course of time his conversion became so complete that he wrote, shortly before his death: "I sympathize with Wagner from the bottom of my heart, so thoroughly that for me the rest of the musical world, with very few exceptions, hardly exists." We shall see later on of what inestimable service this friend was to Wagner during the years when he could not have ventured on German soil without risking his freedom, if not his life.

Besides Beethoven and Weber there were other classical composers for whom Wagner showed his "insolent contempt" by his actions and writings during the Dresden period. One of these was the Italian Palestrina, whose vocal music he tried to introduce in the Catholic Court Chapel: "I wanted to relieve the hard-worked members of the orchestra, add female voices, and introduce true Catholic church music, *a capella*. As a specimen I prepared Palestrina's *Stabat Mater*, and suggested other pieces, but my efforts failed."[1] Wagner showed the influence of Palestrina on his own style, three decades later, in *Parsifal*.

Bach was another of the idols for whom he never ceased trying to make converts. At one of his subscription concerts, in 1848, he brought out one of those magnificent motets of Bach in which, as he says, "the lyric stream of rhythmic melody mingles with the waves of an ocean of harmonies," — which recalls Beethoven's saying, "Not Bach [brook] but Ocean should be his name." In such efforts he was ably assisted by one of

[1] Said in conversation with E. Dannreuther. Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. IV. p. 354.

the Dresden friends to whom the famous letters are written, — Wilhelm Fischer, for whose achievements as chorus director Wagner claims an almost historic significance. Thus, as Wagner relates, "he had taught his theatre-chorus the motet,

> "'Singet dem Herrn' in such a manner that, relying on the uncommonly clever and certain execution of the singers, I could venture to take the first *allegro*, which is commonly, on account of its horrible difficulties, taken as a most cautious *moderato*, at a really fiery pace, which once more, as is well-known, almost frightened our critics to death."

WHAT WAGNER DID FOR GLUCK

In his capacity as operatic conductor, also, Wagner favored the classical repertory as much as in his power lay; but this matter, of course, was controlled ultimately by the royal Director, who, in turn, felt obliged, for pecuniary reasons, to give the public most frequently what it most frequently wanted to hear. You may be sure that it was not Wagner's fault that, for example, in the year in which *Tannhäuser* was first given (1845), Bellini, Donizetti, and Rossini had thirty-three performances together, while Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber combined had only twenty-four.[1] How much the great German composers needed such a champion as Wagner, may be inferred from the extraordinary fact that two of the finest productions of German genius — Marschner's *Hans Heiling* (that gloomy but splendid opera which cast its shadow on the *Flying Dutchman*) and Gluck's

[1] Interesting statistical tables, comprising the years 1842–1845 and 1885 at all the leading German opera-houses, may be found in Kürschner's *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886, pp. 436–465.

Armida — had never been heard at Dresden till Wagner brought them out, though Marschner's masterwork was eleven years old, and Gluck's sixty-six! I have already stated that Wagner chose Weber's ***Euryanthe*** for his "trial performance": the first opera after his installation was Gluck's *Armida*, which made a deep impression.

A still greater success for Gluck Wagner won by the revival of *Iphigenie in Aulis*, which (as the statistical tables referred to in my last foot-note show) had almost entirely disappeared from the German opera-houses. But he was not satisfied with simply reviving Gluck's great work. Suspecting that Spontini or others might have tampered with the score, as used at Berlin, he sent to Paris for the original edition, and found his suspicions verified. A most serious blunder had been made in the overture, in which some one had ignorantly and impudently inserted the word *allegro*, where the original score had no change of tempo.[1] This falsification, which utterly marred the dignity of the overture, had been universally accepted, and was responsible for the unsatisfactory close which Mozart had made for this overture. Wagner altered this close, in accordance with the spirit of the correct score, and at concerts his version is now accepted by all intelligent conductors. He also altered the closing scene of the opera,[2] for reasons similar to those which induced him to change the last scene in his own *Tannhäuser*, about which more anon. He also touched up the instrumentation in some places.

Nor was this all. The reader has doubtless heard of Rousseau's curious opinion that the French language was

[1] See the details in Wagner's *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. V. p. 148.
[2] Details may be found in Glasenapp, Vol. I. pp. 226–228.

not suitable for music. Gluck's *Iphigenie in Aulis*, however, made him change his mind, and induced him to confess frankly that for good, expressive music French was as well adapted as any other language. But the German translation of Gluck's text was so barbarous that Wagner could not persuade himself to use it, before he had spent many hours in correcting it and making the word-accents correspond with the musical accents.[1]

The result justified all this labor. Gluck's opera was a brilliant success, and was repeated six times before the close of the season. But did any one thank him publicly for his labor of love, and point out what he had done to bring back Gluck's opera to honor? Not a bit of it. The critics had pointed out beforehand that this opera was "an unfortunate choice, involving a waste of time and trouble; for nowhere has it been possible to preserve successfully on the modern stage this work of Gluck, which is most antiquated in its form, and unredeemed by its dramatic contents." After this it would have been undiplomatic to change front, for that would have made conspicuous Wagner's share in the success of this revival. In this matter Adolphe Jullien has gone among the Philistines. Gluck, he says (p. 67), was not so antiquated that his scores needed retouching; what would Wagner have thought of the possibility that some one might hereafter retouch his own scores? To which I reply that Wagner, throughout his life, continued (like Bach) to retouch and improve his own scores, and that he would have been the last to wince at the thought that some great composer of the future would bring one of his operas "up to date," if in that way it could be

[1] See the *Wagner-Liszt Correspondence*, Vol. I. No. 41.

redeemed from universal neglect. That was the case with Gluck's opera, as we have seen. The question is less one of art than of common sense. If conservative critics and pedants would rather have the scores of the old masters *unaltered and unperformed* on their shelves than *retouched and brought to life again* with a possibility of success, I am unable to follow them; and I am sure that most of my readers will sympathize with my feelings on this subject.[1]

Liszt, as usual, showed his level-headedness and common sense in this matter. While he was conductor at Weimar he paid much attention to Gluck; and in one of his letters to Wagner he writes: "Would you feel inclined, later on, to make arrangements of *Alceste, Orpheus, Armida,* and *Iphigenie in Tauris* similar to that of *Iphigenie in Aulis,* and what would you ask as compensation?" Wagner replied: "Concerning your excellent suggestion regarding the editing of Gluck's operas — which gave me much pleasure — I shall soon write you

[1] Mr. Joseph Bennett, in his extraordinary parody of Wagner's life, published in the London *Musical Times* (1890–1891), remarks that in this Gluck arrangement "Wagner exhibited his 'discontent with existing things' in a manner which even his most fanatical followers would hardly care to defend." Had Mr. Bennett's ignorance of his subject been somewhat less complete and symmetrical, he would have known that Wagner's most fanatical *foe,* Professor Eduard Hanslick, cordially approves of his version of this opera, in which, he says, "a fine conservative feeling for the characteristics of the past goes hand in hand with a clear perception of modern requirements. True," he continues, "a critic conveys to the reader a greater sense of his own importance if he wails over the omission of every little note as an irreparable loss. But a truer friend and benefactor of Gluck is he who, by sacrificing a few minor details, helps one of his operas to success, than those purists who, from their classical heights, would rather look down on its failure." Wagner's additions in the last act Hanslick pronounces "masterly traits, which enormously increase the dramatic effect without asserting themselves too independently."

a more definite answer." But as there is no further allusion to the matter, we must suppose that the plan was frustrated by other projects and tasks.

TWO SPONTINI ANECDOTES

Most opportunely we find, in one of the papers in which Wagner describes his experiences in Dresden,[1] an anecdote which shows how great composers would be apt to look on their modern "editors" — provided they are such editors as Franz was of Bach and Handel, and Wagner was of Gluck, Beethoven, and Palestrina: —

"In course of a conversation with Spontini I begged him to tell me why he, who was usually so much addicted to an energetic use of the trombones, oddly kept them in silence in the magnificent triumphal march of the first act (*La Vestale*). Astonished, he asked me, 'Didn't I write a part for the trombones?' I showed him the printed score, whereupon he begged me to add a part for the trombones, to be used, if possible, at the next rehearsal. Then he said: 'In your *Rienzi* I heard an instrument which you call the "bass-tuba"; I do not wish to banish this instrument from the orchestra; write a part for it in my *Vestale*.' It gave me pleasure to comply with this request, and I did so with care and discretion. When, at the rehearsal, he first noted the effect of this addition, he cast on me a really most tender look of gratitude, and the impression made on him by this not-difficult enrichment of his score was so lasting that some time later he sent me from Paris a most friendly letter, in which he begged me to send him a copy of these additional parts which I had written; only his pride did not permit him to admit by his language that he desired something that I had written for him, so he said: 'send me a copy of the trombone parts in the triumphal march and of the bass-tuba part, as they were played under my direction at Dresden.'"

[1] *Reminiscences of Spontini*, Vol. V. p. 120.

Of this extraordinary pride and vanity of Spontini, Wagner's *Reminiscences* contain several other amusing illustrations, only one of which, however, can be cited here, as the others belong rather in a Spontini than in a Wagner biography. "When I heard your *Rienzi*," Spontini remarked one day, "I said, this is a man of genius, but he has already done more than he can do." Being urged to explain this oracular utterance, Spontini frankly expounded at considerable length, how *he* had exhausted all operatic possibilities, so that it was useless and foolish to try to write any more operas. — In spite of this advice Wagner continued recklessly to write operas, and if Spontini could come to life to-day, he would be the most astonished man in the world on seeing how his own works have almost entirely vanished, while to Wagner the opera-houses devote about one-fourth of all their performances! It must be said, however, that Spontini does not deserve such entire neglect. With all his faults he was at least an honest artist, of whom Wagner wrote — in his usual abusive manner — that "with him died a grand, most estimable, and noble art-period. . . . Let us bow deeply and reverently before the grave of the creator of *La Vestale*, *Cortez*, and *Olympia!*"

TANNHÄUSER IN DRESDEN

EVENTFUL and busy years were the seven that Wagner spent in Dresden; for in this short period three of his operas had their first performance, while two — *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* — were also composed during this time. It has already been stated that the sketch of *Tannhäuser* was made even before the *Rienzi* rehearsals began, in 1842; but there were so many interruptions, and so much of Wagner's time was taken up with his duties as royal conductor, that the score of the opera was not completed till three years later. Concerning his state of mind during its composition, he has made this interesting revelation: —

"Into this work I had precipitated myself with my whole soul, and with such consuming ardor that, the nearer I approached its end, the more I was haunted by an idea that a sudden death would prevent me from completing it; so that after writing the last note I had a feeling of joyous elation, as if I had escaped a mortal danger."

To a friend in Berlin, to whom he sent a copy of the score, he wrote, in a similar vein: —

"Here is my *Tannhäuser*, body and soul: a *German* from top to toe. May he be able to win the hearts of my *German* countrymen in a larger measure than my other works have succeeded in doing so far! This opera must be good, or else I never shall be

able to do anything that is good. It acted on me like real magic; whenever and wherever I took up my subject I was all aglow and trembling with excitement; after the various long interruptions from work, the first breath always transported me back into the fragrant atmosphere that had intoxicated me at its first conception. The first performance is to be in September. At the end of this month I shall go to Marienbad, and in August I shall return to Dresden to rehearse *Tannhäuser*. Piano scores, etc., are all completed, so that, on the day after the performance, I shall be perfectly free and at leisure."

THE STORY OF TANNHÄUSER

It is no wonder that Wagner was so bewitched by his new work: he could not have found a more fascinating subject, or one more admirably suited for a musical setting than the story of Tannhäuser and the Vocal Contest in the Wartburg. It takes us back to the early part of the thirteenth century, the time when Christian doctrines had not yet succeeded in driving from the popular mind various superstitions about heathen deities. One of these deities, Holda, had become identified with the Venus of ancient classical mythology, and instead of being, as formerly, the simple goddess of beauty and the charms of nature, was now looked upon as a wicked temptress to lust and sensual depravity. This mediæval Venus of the North inhabited the interior of mountains, with nymphs and sirens and other seductive attendants, whose duty was to decoy victims into her grottoes, where they found resistance impossible and soon were given up to eternal perdition. One of these subterranean courts of Venus was in the Hörselberg, near the Wartburg, in Thuringia, and it is this romantic locality that forms the scenic background of Wagner's opera.

Act I. Scene: a vast grotto, extending indefinitely. On one side a green waterfall plunges tumultuously over the rocks. A brook carries this water to the background, where it forms a lake in which Naiads are seen bathing, while Sirens are reclining on the banks. The rocks which form the sides of the cave are covered with curious, coral-like tropical growths. In a branch of the grotto, to the left, suffused with a rosy light, Venus is seen reclining on a couch, while Tannhäuser kneels at her side, his head resting in her lap, and his harp lying at his side. Youths and nymphs are dancing and frolicking about the foaming pool formed by the waterfall; and from the background a train of Bacchantes comes running in, urging the dancers to wild revelry. Satyrs and Fauns emerge from side grottoes, mix with the loving couples, chase the nymphs, and raise the confusion and excitement to its highest pitch. Horrified, the three Graces now rise from their place behind the couch of Venus and attempt to check the revelry. They awake the sleeping Amorettes and drive them from their lair. Like a flock of birds the Amorettes fly upwards, place themselves as in battle array, and shoot a continuous shower of arrows into the confused groups below. The wounded ones, seized by the pangs of love, sink down in languorous exhaustion, and are driven towards the background by the Graces. The other actors in this amorous pantomime also disappear in various directions, and the Graces return to Venus, as if to report their victory over the wild passions of her subjects. The seductive song of the Sirens is now wafted from the lake, inviting wayfarers into the cave. A dissolving view shows the abduction of Europa, who is seen seated on the back of

the white bull, decked with flowers. Another view shows Leda reclining by a lake, in the woods, in soft moonlight. The swan swims up to her and rests his neck caressingly on her bosom. As this picture vanishes, the Graces also disappear, and Venus and Tannhäuser are left alone.

Tannhäuser starts, as if waking from a dream. All these lascivious scenes, which Venus has evoked for the gratification of his senses, delight him no more. Long has he tarried and dallied with the joys that Venus has lavished on him; but suddenly the remembrance of the upper world, with its blue sky and sunlight, its flowers and birds and forests, has come over him, and eagerly he begs Venus to let him depart. Always, he promises, shall his praise be only of her charms and her love; ever will he be her champion: but he is not a god, cannot always enjoy; his human heart longs for the human sorrows which alone make the joys alternating with them real joys. Venus is indignant at this change in her favored lover. She coaxes and threatens in turn; predicts that he will soon long eagerly to return to these divine pleasures, when it will be too late. But Tannhäuser remains obdurate. "Not in you, goddess of joy, rests my salvation, but in the *Virgin Mary!*" he exclaims; and the moment he utters the word *Mary* there is a terrible detonation, as of an earthquake, and Venus with her grotto has vanished instantaneously. Tannhäuser stands alone in a beautiful green valley, the blue sky overhead, to the right the stately Wartburg, while on an eminence to the left a young shepherd accompanies with his pipe and song the tinkling of the bells in his herds. He sings of Frau Holda and the

pleasures of spring till he is interrupted by a chorus of pilgrims who are on their way to Rome. Their solemn chant is first heard faintly in the distance, then becomes nearer and louder as the pilgrims cross the stage, and finally dies away again in the distance. Tannhäuser, deeply affected, sinks on his knees. The burden of his sins weighs him down, and he vows to atone for them by seeking toil and torture without rest.

The sound of distant church-bells accompanies his prayer, and when it ceases, hunting-horns are heard coming nearer and nearer. The Landgrave of Thuringia, accompanied by the Knights and Minnesingers, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Walther von der Vogelweide, Biterolf, and others, comes on the stage. They recognize the long-lost Tannhäuser, greet him cordially, and invite him to return with them to the Wartburg. But as this does not agree with his resolution to do penance, he holds back, until Wolfram touches a responsive chord by begging him to stay for the sake of *Elisabeth*. He does not hesitate to tell him the open secret that he won the heart of the Landgrave's niece at one of the Minnesinger contests. Elisabeth herself did not keep the secret, for ever since Tannhäuser's mysterious disappearance, soon after that event, she had avoided the Knights and their contests, and pined away in solitude. "Return to us with your song, so that she too may grace our festivals again," Wolfram concludes. "To her, to her," Tannhäuser sings with sudden enthusiasm and rapture, in which he is joined by the other Knights and the Landgrave in a glorious septet. Hunting-horns again resound, echoed by the companions in the woods; and as the hunters crowd on the stage with their horses, dogs,

and deer, the curtain falls on the grandest operatic act created up to the year of its production.

Act II. The Landgrave has summoned the nobles of his land to witness a prize contest of the Minnesingers, at which the subject (as at the mediæval "Courts of Love") is to be the nature of Love.[1] After the nobles and their ladies have assembled in the large banqueting-hall, the Landgrave makes an address in which he announces that the winner of the vocal prize may ask of the queen of the festival any reward, even should it be her hand and heart. Elisabeth hears this without alarm, for she has just met Tannhäuser and confessed her love to him. Nor does she fear that he will be beaten in the contest, even by Wolfram, although he too is an excellent bard and also loves her — but with a different love from Tannhäuser's, as the sequel soon shows. It is Wolfram who opens the contest, and he sings of love in the manner of the Minnesingers, as a kind of unselfish adoration and self-sacrifice, free from all material alloy. Against this ascetic, one-sided view of love Tannhäuser protests. The fountain of love should, indeed, be pure, he sings, but if we never drank from it to quench our thirst, the race would soon come to an end. Elisabeth, with the correct instincts of youth and beauty, makes a sign of approval, but stops short on noticing that the spectators, taught by hypocritic cus-

[1] This contest in all probability took place at the Wartburg in 1207, although some historians pronounce it a myth (see, *e.g.*, Elson's *History of German Song*, pp. 17–25). "Minnesingers" means "love-singers," and these minstrels had a special goddess of love, Frau Minne, who typified the pure, super-sensual aspect of love, which alone interested these bards (in their songs). One feature of the contest which one would like to see revived at certain performances of Wagner's opera was that, while the best singer received a prize, "the worst was to be at once taken out and hung."

tom to assume a higher ideal than man can — or should — live up to, remain sternly silent. And when the other singers join in Wolfram's strain, exaggerating the metaphysical side of love and censuring Tannhäuser, the latter is driven by a feeling of opposition into the other extreme. Has he not promised Venus to sing of love as she has taught it to him? Forgetting everything else in the excitement of the angry contest, he finally bursts out into a passionate song of praise to the heathen goddess, declaring that he alone can know real love who has dwelt in the Venusberg.[1]

Horror and consternation are the result of his outburst. All the ladies leave in haste and disorder, Elisabeth alone remaining, pale as death. "He has been in the Venusberg, the sinner, by his own confession! he must die," the Knights shout, and crowd around Tannhäuser with drawn swords. At this moment Elisabeth utters a piercing scream and throws herself between him and his assailants with the words: —

"Away from him! Not ye may be his judges!
Shame on you! Cast away the angry sword!
And mark the words that come from maiden's lips;
Learn ye through me of God's all-gracious will!

"The wretched one, whom grim temptation
In fearful folds has so enfurl'd;
How! Shall not he obtain salvation,
Through rue and penance in this world?

"Ye who are strong in your believing,
Would ye deny God's holy will?
Why of all hope him thus bereaving?
So say hath he e'er wrought you ill?

[1] See Wagner's interesting comments on this scene, Vol. V. pp. 195–199.

"See me, the maid whose life is blighted
By him, with one dread, fearful stroke;
Whose soul by love was sweetly lighted,
Till cruelly her heart he broke.

"I plead for him; I plead his life; ye spare him;
I pray his steps in penitence ye guide;
The gentle message of Redemption bear him, —
That for him, too, once our good Saviour died."

Tannhäuser is saved. In deep contrition he exclaims: —

"When from the path of grace I wandered
An angel came my steps to guide;
But ah, to wild desire I pandered, —
And gazed on her in lustful pride.

"O thou who rulest in the Heavens above me,
Who sent the angel of thy love to me;
Have mercy on me, though vile sin could move me,
To once deny thy messenger and Thee."

The Landgrave informs him that a band of pilgrims has just formed to go to Rome. His only way to escape eternal damnation is to join them and seek the Pope's absolution. At this moment the chorus of the pilgrims is heard in the valley, and Tannhäuser, his face illumined with a sudden ray of hope, shouts "To Rome!" and rushes out to join them. Not for his own sake does he hope for pardon, but to dry the tears of Elisabeth, who, by sharing his sorrows, has suddenly revealed to him a higher love than that of Venus, who only shared his joys.

Act III. The scene represents the valley of the Wartburg, as in the first act, but in autumnal coloring and

twilight. Elisabeth is seen kneeling before a wayside shrine of the Virgin, praying for Tannhäuser. Suddenly the song of the returning pilgrims is heard. They come nearer and uncover their heads as they pass the shrine; but Elisabeth's anxious gaze fails to find Tannhäuser among them. After they have all disappeared, Wolfram approaches and begs permission to escort Elisabeth to the castle; but she only shakes her head sorrowfully, with a significant gesture implying that she has no more need of earthly assistance or companionship. Wolfram, thus left alone, sings his pathetic song to the Evening Star, ending with the lines: —

> "O thou belovèd Evening Star,
> I greet thee gladly from afar;
> From heart that hers could ne'er betray,
> Greet, when she pass on her heavenward way,
> When she has left this vale of sorrow,
> For realms of light and endless morrow."

Meanwhile the twilight has deepened into night, when Wolfram suddenly notices a pilgrim tottering along with the aid of his staff, his garments torn, his face pale and convulsed. Recognizing Tannhäuser by his voice, he asks whether he has dared to set foot on that soil again before obtaining absolution. "Fear not," Tannhäuser replies; "it is not you nor your companions that I seek; it is that road which once I found so easily — the road to the Venusberg. Can you tell me the way to it?" "Madman!" Wolfram retorts; "is that your goal? Say, have you not been in Rome?" "Speak not of Rome!" Tannhäuser shouts angrily; but at last Wolfram succeeds in calming him, and he relates the pathetic adventures which have brought him to the present pass.

He had gone to Rome, in deep contrition to obtain the Pope's forgiveness, like the other pilgrims; but to him alone it was refused. The Pope hurled at him the crushing message that if he has dwelt in the Venusberg, there is no more hope of securing forgiveness for his sins than there is that the dry staff in his hand shall bring forth green leaves.

Before he has concluded this narrative, a light mist has covered the background; presently a rosy light suffuses it, and Venus is seen reclining on her couch, surrounded by dancing nymphs. In seductive tones interwoven with the weird orchestral sounds that vividly recall the seductive scenes of the first act, she welcomes back to her grotto the faithless lover. Wolfram tries to hold him back; but is fast losing ground, when by a sudden inspiration, he once more utters the magic word *Elisabeth*. At the same instant a chorus of monks is heard singing her funeral dirge. "Woe! he is lost to me," is the lament of Venus, as she suddenly disappears with her magic surroundings. The rising sun casts its first rays on the valley, from which the funeral procession, comprising the Landgrave, the knights and singers, and the older pilgrims, approaches slowly with the body of Elisabeth in an open bier. As it reaches the foreground, Tannhäuser falls dead on the coffin with the words, "Saint Elisabeth, pray for me." At the same moment the younger pilgrims arrive on the scene, bearing aloft the Pope's staff covered with fresh green, betokening the salvation of Tannhäuser through a miracle. Once more the sublime choral theme of the pardoned pilgrims is intoned by all the vocal and instrumental forces combined, thus bringing the opera to a thrilling final climax.

THE POEM AND THE MUSIC

With the legend on which this opera is based Wagner had become familiar as a boy, in Tieck's version, which, however, was not of such a nature as to suggest its operatic possibilities to him. It was not till he came across the story in its simple popular form that it began to fascinate his artistic imagination, which also eagerly seized on the dramatic significance of its casual connection with the story of the Vocal Contest in the Wartburg. Heine's Tannhäuser poem and other sources may have suggested some details, but as a drama, the plot and poetry are as much his own as are the dramas or epics of the great "literary" poets that are based on legends, and the number of which is legion. The fact that so many great poets, from Æschylus to the present day, have found their favorite subjects in the mythical world, shows that Wagner was guided by a correct instinct when he abandoned history in favor of legend; and the music drama, still more than the literary drama or epic, craves a mythical atmosphere, because the primitive myths of a great nation are, like its folk-songs and proverbs, the gems of feeling, thought, and fancy, freed from all alloy and dross by the friction of time, and, like music itself, they are not concerned with the accidents of time and space. Even the brief and imperfect synopsis of Wagner's dramatic poem given above will enable the reader to form some idea of the wonderful variety and striking contrasts — emotional and scenic — which abound in this opera. Think of the wild orgies of the bacchanal on the stage, with the rising tide of voluptu-

ous sounds in the orchestra; of the passionate scene between Tannhäuser and Venus, now threatening, now pleading; the startling suddenness of the change from the fantastic grotto to the sunlit Wartburg valley; the shepherd singing and blowing his simple quaint melody; the appearance of the pilgrims chanting their solemn chorus, crossing the stage and disappearing; the greeting of Tannhäuser, and the joyous septet; the arrival of the hunting party,— and think that in the following acts the contrasts are hardly less striking, and you will begin to realize Wagner's unprecedented genius for dramatic effects suitable for musical illustration. And these effects are not dragged on by the hair, for their own sake, — as often in Myerbeer and others, — but are the natural and legitimate outcome of the dramatic situation.

In the second act we have the stirring march, which, with the overture, has perhaps done more to make Wagner popular with the masses than anything else he has written; Elisabeth's greeting; the vocal contest, in which, however, Wagner's melodic fount does not flow as freely as in other parts of the opera;[1] and the magnificent ensemble near the close. The lover of stage pageantry is gratified by the entrance of the nobles and their ladies in mediæval attire. But the climax of this act is at the

[1] Richard Pohl, in his brief biography of Wagner (pp. 154–157), makes some extremely interesting revelations and remarks regarding this much-discussed contest. Weber's son told him that his father had once intended to write an opera on the Tannhäuser legend, but gave it up chiefly on account of the difficulty presented by this vocal contest. He felt, no doubt, that this contest was not a musical tournament for showing off pretty melodies and fine voices, but a *poetic* rivalry to explain the nature of love. Wagner, being a poet as well as a musician, was able to overcome the difficulty by placing the chief interest in the verse and giving the vocal music the character of an improvisation, in harmony with the situation.

moment when Elisabeth throws herself with a piercing cry between her lover and the swords of his assailants. This scene, well acted, is comparable to anything in Shakespeare. And what a variety of dramatic detail is inherent in Tannhäuser's rôle, from the moment when he startles his hearers with his Venusberg song until his determination to go to Rome — the bewilderment, humiliation, remorse, admiration of the heroine, gratitude and dawning hope as the thought of securing salvation for his sins occurs to him — can be realized by those only who have seen Albert Niemann enacting this part — a part of which Wagner himself has declared "without hesitation, that a thoroughly successful interpretation of it is the highest achievement a tenor can reach in his art."

Tannhäuser's narrative of his Roman pilgrimage was voted the most tedious thing in the whole opera by the Dresdeners in 1845, and by the "critics"! To-day this superb "drama within a drama," as Liszt has aptly called it, is rated as the finest episode in the opera, even by non-Germans. The distinguished Italian critic, Filippo Filippi, wrote in 1870 that "this narrative is the most perfect piece in the opera, in which musical expressiveness reaches its climax"; while, ten years before, the French Gaspérini wrote that it is "a masterwork of realism, passion, and invention. The melody — I speak of the true, the divine — rises in waves and without effort. Every incident of this sad pilgrimage is told with striking eloquence." But to do justice to this musical narrative the tenor must have qualities of which lyric singers rarely dream — genuine passion, histrionic talent, and a voice which modulates its clang-

tints as well as its dramatic accents in harmony with the import of every word. Recited by such a tenor, the Pope's words —

> "If thou hast shared the joys of hell,
> If thou unholy flames hast nursed,
> That in the Hill of Venus dwell,
> Thou art forevermore accursed!"

strike terror to the hearts of the hearers and proclaim Wagner one of the world's greatest dramatists.

IS TANNHÄUSER A MUSIC-DRAMA?

After the foregoing remarks this question may seem superfluous; but when we find Wagner insisting (VII. 175) that *Tristan* represents a longer step from *Tannhäuser* than that which he made in getting to *Tannhäuser* from *Rienzi* and the typical modern opera, we feel called upon to draw the distinction between an opera and a music-drama more finely. Wagner's ideal of a music-drama is a stage play in which scenery, action, words, and music co-operate so minutely in every bar that they are absolutely inseparable, and lose half their beauty and significance if separated from each other. *Tristan* is such a music-drama: none of its music is as effective in the concert hall as in connection with the drama which completes it, and which it completes. *Tannhäuser* is not: the overture, the march, the choruses, Elisabeth's prayer, the song to the evening star, the septet, etc., are pieces which are not seriously marred by being torn from the operatic stage and placed in the concert hall. In so far as this is the case, *Tannhäuser* is, therefore, not a music-drama, but an opera — though infinitely

removed from the old-fashioned Italian opera which Wagner has called a "concert in costume," and which is little but a string of arias, with an orchestra playing a simple accompaniment — like a "huge guitar."

In other respects, however, *Tannhäuser* is a genuine music-drama. Even in the pieces which are found suitable for concert performance the emotional character of the music is always the same as that of the poetry — as witness the festive march, the solemn pilgrims' chorus, the pathetic prayer, etc. Nor is there anything in this score comparable to the cheap operatic apotheosis which closes the *Flying Dutchman*. Wagner himself points out that the chief difference between *Tannhäuser* and preceding operas — by himself and others — is that in it there are *no concessions to the gallery*. Even Weber — who would have liked to be Wagner had he dared — had his "gallery," as he called his wife (an experienced singer), to whom he appealed whenever he was afraid that his artistic ideals were conflicting too much with popular taste and usage. But when Wagner wrote *Tannhäuser*, he had given up all consideration for the gallery. When the *Flying Dutchman* had failed to please the gallery, he had made up his mind to write no longer with an eye to immediate popular appreciation, but solely with a view to following his own impulses and to winning the approval of his own conscience and that of a few friends who appreciated his ideals.

I cannot sufficiently urge the reader to study the Guide to the Performance of *Tannhäuser* (v. 161–204), which Wagner wrote about ten years after the production of the opera, and which is one of the most instructive dramaturgic essays ever written. Being concerned with concrete

illustrations, it makes his aims and ideals clearer than his more elaborate and abstruse theoretical writings. In it he shows why this opera, if performed by mere singing puppets, loses all its best points. He declares that even the shallowest Italian opera would gain in effect if the singers would try to bring out such connection as may exist between the play and the music, but insists that his own operas are absolutely ruined unless this is done and the artists act as well as sing. He carefully analyzes the principal rôles with the acute insight of a Salvini; explains to the stage-manager the illustrative character of the music and the necessity of his following carefully not only the scenic directions printed in the libretto, but the more minute ones written in the orchestral score; and also gives many valuable hints to the conductor regarding tempi and other matters; in a word, he does all he can to emphasize the fact that *Tannhäuser* is not merely an opera but a music-*drama*, which, like an ordinary play, should first be read to the assembled singers, and its action made clear, before they take their musical rôles home to study. To bring about the closest possible correspondence between the singers and the players, he insists that the words should be written over every orchestral part, as was done by him in Dresden. The forty-first letter in the correspondence with Liszt contains a passage which may be cited, as it shows how unwonted Wagner's demands were — and how little the reformer was heeded at the time: —

"I had taken pains in Dresden to have all the directions which threw any light on the situations and dramatic action copied with the greatest minuteness into the parts of the singers; but when it came to the performance, I was horrified to see that none of them

had been heeded. You can imagine my amazement when I saw, for instance, that Tannhäuser, in the vocal contest, when he sings his hymn to Venus,

> 'He only who has clasped you in his arms
> Knows what it is to love,'

addressed it, in the face of the whole assembly, to Elisabeth, the most innocent of maidens! How could the public help being puzzled and left in ignorance? In truth, I discovered in Dresden at the time that it was only through the text-book that the audience could discover the dramatic contents of my opera, and only in that way learn to understand the performance!"

The same letter — which is dated Sept. 8, 1850, and has almost as great practical value for the performers and critics of Wagner's operas as the *Tannhäuser* Guide just referred to — has another specific example which may be cited for the light it throws on Wagner's views as to the function and treatment of the orchestra in a music-drama: —

"At a rehearsal of *Tannhäuser* in Weimar I had occasion to call the attention of some of the artists to their neglect of the scenic directions. The score, for instance, directs Elisabeth, after the duet with Tannhäuser in the second act, to justify the reappearance of the tender theme of the clarinet in a slower tempo, by gazing after Tannhäuser into the court below, and nodding a farewell. Now, if she fails to do this, the result is an insufferable delay of the action; every bar of dramatic music can justify its existence only by expressing something relating to the action or the character of the actor: that reminiscence in the theme of the clarinet, therefore, does not exist for its own sake, — say, to produce a musical effect which Elisabeth may or may not accompany by her action, — but the greeting she sends after Tannhäuser is the *main thing* that I had in mind in composing this scene, and that reminiscence was therefore chosen by me solely for the sake of illustrating this action of Elisabeth. This example shows what a topsy-turvy result fol-

lows if the principal point — the dramatic action — is overlooked, and only a secondary factor — the accompaniment of that action — remains."

How far away all this takes us from the typical "opera," which Wagner, in his essay on *Art and Revolution* (III. 26) defines as "a chaos of sensuous allurements fluttering about without union or connection, from which everybody can choose what best suits his taste, here the graceful skip of a dancer, there the audacious runs of a singer, here a dazzling scenic effect, there the stunning outbreak of an orchestral volcano" — all introduced in the opera for their own sake, without any connection with the plot.

There is one more important respect in which *Tannhäuser* differs from the typical opera; namely, by the frequent use that is made in it of those reminiscent melodies which are associated with a particular person, incident, or dramatic emotion, and which recur in the music whenever the person or idea recurs in the play. These are known as typical or leading motives, and they form such an important addition to the anatomy of the music-drama — its very backbone, in fact — that a special chapter must be devoted to them later on, after considering the dramas in which they have reached their full development. In *Tannhäuser* they are not yet used systematically throughout the play, which therefore cannot be called a full-fledged music-drama. It is the above-mentioned "concert numbers" (the march, song to the evening star, Elisabeth's prayer, etc.) that — however beautiful they may be in themselves — are objectionable from this higher dramatic point of view, because they are not organically connected with the rest of the music.

But, after all, these are only episodes (not undramatic in themselves either), and the rest of the score is welded together by real "leading motives." A German, Arthur Smolian, has analyzed the score and found as many as thirty-three of these leading motives which he cites and discusses in a special pamphlet.[1] The method followed is that originated by Hans von Wolzogen for the *Nibelung's Ring;* and the names chosen for these *Tannhäuser* motives may be quoted for their suggestiveness: —

Theme of the pardoned pilgrims; the penitent call for succor; the feast of divine grace; the bacchanalian dance; strains of maddening revelry; the riotous shout; bold yearning; the wild cry of delight; sin's desire; hymn to Venus; the temptation melody; the intoxicated gestures; the senses' mastering spell; the decoy-call of the sirens; the theme of peace; love's embraces; the witching glance; Venus's curse; pilgrimage theme; avowal of belief; theme of thanksgiving; hunting call; wondering question and embarrassed answer; summons to return; song of joyous transport; the gracious greeting; love of minstrelsy; the praise of pure love; the intercession; the command to penance; bitter remorse; the hymn of promise; the papal ban. These themes are less broad and song-like than the "concert numbers," but are "condensed to the pregnant terseness of the later leading motives," as Herr Smolian aptly puts it.

THE FIRST PERFORMANCES

Although Wagner's second Dresden opera had failed to please the public, the royal director was willing enough to give him "another show," probably in the belief that the brilliant success of *Rienzi* and the failure of the *Dutchman* had opened his eyes as to what kind of

[1] An English version, by W. A. Ellis, is published by Chappell & Co., London.

an opera was expected of him. So he took pains to put on the new work in the best style. Schroeder-Devrient, Johanna Wagner (the composer's niece), Tichatschek, and Mitterwurzer — all of them famous names in operatic annals — had the rôles of Venus, Elisabeth, Tannhäuser, and Wolfram; while the scenery was specially ordered in Paris, and concerning its promised splendors the papers had many preliminary notices; so that, although prices had been almost doubled, the house was crowded by an audience full of curiosity, including many who had come from Leipzig and other cities.

The first performance took place on Oct. 19, 1845, the fourth on Nov. 2. On Nov. 3 Wagner sent this interesting letter to his friend, Gaillard, in Berlin:[1] —

"My Dear and Valued Friend, — I have gained a big action with my *Tannhäuser*. Let me give you a very short account of a few of the facts. Owing to the hoarseness of some of the singers, the second performance was played a week after the first; this was very bad, for, in the long interval, ignorance, and erroneous and absurd views, fostered by my enemies, who exerted themselves vigorously, had full scope for swaggering about; and when the moment of the second performance at length arrived, my opera was on the point of failing; the house was not well filled; opposition! prejudice! Luckily, however, all the singers were as enthusiastic as ever; intelligence made a way for itself, and the third act, somewhat shortened, was especially successful; after the singers had been called out, there was a tumultuous cry for *me*. I have now formed a nucleus among the public; at the third performance there was a well-filled house and an enthusiastic reception of the work. After every act the singers and the author were tumultuously applauded; in the third act, at the words, 'Heinrich, du bist erloest!' the house resounded with an outburst of enthusiasm. Yesterday, at length, the fourth performance took place

[1] See *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, 1877, p. 411.

before a house crammed to suffocation; after every act the singers were called out, and after them, on each occasion, the author; after the second act there was a regular tumult! Wherever I show myself people greet me enthusiastically. My dear Gaillard, this is, indeed, a rare success, and, under the circumstances, one for which I scarcely hoped. My servant girl, who was in the fourth tier, assures me that people round about her thought this opera was better than *Rienzi*. What more can I want?

"I felt compelled to tell you this in the joy of my heart. When I think of you, a deep feeling of thorough melancholy steals over me, and springs from my regret at bringing you here for the first performance; for in the following performances Tichatschek was much better, nay, frequently most splendid. How wretchedly I received you! in what a humdrum, wearisome fashion I returned your great sacrifice! It quite oppresses me whenever I think of it. These last days I felt as though I was stunned. How can I make up for this? can you tell me? Farewell, my dear and noble friend.

"Always your truly devoted

"RICHARD WAGNER."

This exuberant joy did not, however, last long, and Wagner soon awoke from his dream to find that *Tannhäuser* was even less understood, and destined to attract less attention outside of Dresden, than the *Dutchman*. Six years later, in reviewing these occurrences in his autobiographic *Communication to my Friends* (IV. 357) he accordingly summed up the situation as follows: —

"The public had shown me plainly, by its enthusiastic reception of *Rienzi*, and by the colder treatment of the *Dutchman*, what I must offer it to win approval. Its expectations I disappointed utterly; confused and dissatisfied it left the first performance of *Tannhäuser*. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of complete isolation. The few friends who heartily sympathized with me were themselves so depressed by my painful position, that the perception of this sympathetic ill-humor was the only friendly sign about me. A week passed before we could give a second performance,

which was so much needed to clear up erroneous notions. This week contained a whole life's experience for me. Not wounded pride, but the calamity of an utterly annihilated illusion, overwhelmed me. I saw clearly that my *Tannhäuser* had appealed only to a few intimate friends, but not to the public. . . . Thanks to the good will of the director, and above all to the zeal and talents of the artists, my opera gradually succeeded in making its way (it had seven performances in nine weeks and was resumed the next season). But this success could not deceive me any more ; I now *knew* how I stood with the public, and if any doubts had remained, my subsequent experiences would have soon removed them."

But what was the matter with the public that Wagner should have been so disappointed with it? What more could it do than attend his opera twenty times? An excellent answer to this is contained in the sixty-seventh letter to Uhlig: —

"If I express dissatisfaction with the success of my operas, I naturally do not mean outward success (for could I have demanded more than to be called before the curtain at every performance of *Tannhäuser*?), but merely the character of the success, which made me see that the *essential* in my work had *not* been grasped."

In one word, the public cared only for the *operatic* features — the lyric parts — in *Tannhäuser*, and failed to appreciate its great significance as a *music-drama*. To some extent, as we have already seen, the singers were to blame for this; for although they were the best in Germany, Wagner's dramatic style of vocalism was so new to them that they did not feel at home in it, as present-day dramatic singers do. Hence he was obliged to make several cuts in the parts of Tannhäuser and Elisabeth — cuts which destroyed the unity of the score and obscured some of its most important points. The

Tannhäuser Guide (Vol. V.) gives all the instructive details; and here, too, Wagner exclaims: —

"Any intelligent person may judge what must have been my attitude toward the external success of my work in Dresden, and whether twenty performances, each with a 'recall' of the author, could compensate me for the gnawing conviction that a great share of the applause was based on a misconception of my artistic aims."

All of which may seem eccentric to some persons; but if Wagner had not been "eccentric," he would not have become the creator of the modern music-drama.

One of the most regrettable consequences of these omissions was that, although most of them were based on purely local causes, they were afterwards ignorantly adopted in other opera-houses as having been "sanctioned by the author." An interesting case in point is the chorus of the younger pilgrims with the green staff, at the close of the opera. In the thirty-sixth letter to Uhlig Wagner directs that this miracle scene must be completely restored: —

"The reason for leaving out the announcement of the miracle in the Dresden change was quite a local one: the chorus was always poor, flat, and uninteresting; moreover, an imposing scenic effect — a splendid, gradual sunrise — was wanting. But here, where I wish to express my idea to the full, that consideration has no longer any weight with me."

All these things — the mutilations, misconceptions, and misinterpretations — finally combined to make him exclaim in another letter to Uhlig (1852), "The remembrances of the Dresden *Tannhäuser* are a torture to me." And a few months later: —

"Do you know that the revival of *Tannhäuser* at Dresden has had quite an uncomfortable effect on me? From all my informa-

tion, I am convinced that *even now Tannhäuser* has won no right to genuine success in Dresden. . . . The chief blame for this, I maintain, lies in the defects of the performance. The *real Tannhäuser* is not made manifest at all, no sympathy is aroused for it. . . . This Dresden, had I remained in it, would have become the grave of my art."

WHY THE ENDING WAS CHANGED

From all these citations we can see that every cut which Wagner reluctantly made in his score at Dresden in order to facilitate its performance must have been a suicidal stab at his own heart, because it made it the more difficult for the public to realize his intentions. On the other hand, he saw his own shortcomings quite as clearly as those of his singers. There were several places in the score that did not satisfy him when he heard them on the stage; these he immediately went to work to improve. One of these was the introduction to the last act, concerning which he wrote to Liszt, some years later (*Correspondence,* No. 72) that

"in Tannhäuser's narrative (Act III.) the trombones, in the reminiscence of Rome, do not at all produce the right impression unless this theme has been heard before in its fullest splendor, as I give it in the (revised) instrumental instruction to the third act."

Of greater importance was the improvement which he made in the last scene of the opera. In the first version, Venus with her attendants did not actually appear to the vision again, but was only hinted at by a red glow on the neighboring Venusberg, nor was Elisabeth's body brought on the stage, the funeral being only announced by distant bell-ringing. Why Wagner altered this is

most vividly brought out in two passages from his letters to Uhlig (No. 32) and to Liszt (No. 72). To Uhlig he wrote: —

"You have not grasped the right meaning of the ending of *Tannhäuser*. This ending is no *alteration*, but a *rectification*, which, unfortunately, I could only make after seeing the work on the stage, when I became convinced that the former ending only gave a *hint* of what had to be actually communicated to the *senses*. I understand that slaves of custom prefer the first (because accustomed) ending — and all the more as the rectification in Dresden was insufficiently carried out so far as stage management was concerned. But in a certain sense I am ashamed of the first version of the end which, in truth, is only a sketch: it should therefore cease to be known, and of course disappear *entirely* from the pianoforte score."

"The mere illumination of the Venusberg" (he wrote to Liszt) "was only a hint: to make the magic real, Venus has to come and show herself. How true this is you may see from the fact that this very added scene suggested to me a wealth of new musical material. Examine the scene with Venus in the last act, and you will agree with me that the first version compares to it as an engraving does to an oil-painting. So it is also with the appearance of Elisabeth's body: when Tannhäuser sinks down before that itself and sings, 'Sainted Elisabeth, pray for me,' we have the full presentment of what before was only hinted at."[1]

CRITICAL PHILISTINES AND PROPHETS

So far as the public and the enlightened critics of that time were concerned, Wagner might have spared himself the trouble of improving his score. One of the critics declared that the new ending was "quite as bad as the first," and that was the keynote of almost all the

[1] The still more important changes which he made fifteen years later in the "Paris version" of *Tannhäuser* will be considered in the chapter on "*Tannhäuser* in Paris."

criticisms. Schroeder-Devrient herself, who was not a particularly successful Venus, told Wagner: "You are a man of genius, but you write such eccentric stuff, it is hardly possible to sing it"; while the royal director, von Lüttichau, tried to make clear to him that in one thing, at any rate, Weber was his superior, inasmuch as *he* knew how to give his operas a happy ending.[1]

The Dresden correspondent of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* analyzes *Tannhäuser* at some length to prove "its utter lack of character-drawing," which, in view of the highly intellectual and dramatic character of the opera librettos produced up to that date, gives us a delightful insight into German critical judgment. The same writer fortifies his position by adding that "nothing is proved by the fact that the author was called before the curtain, for the same distinction was conferred last year on the composer of two operas which disappeared from the repertory after the fourth performance." A distinguished musical pedagogue of the time, Moritz Hauptmann, heard the *Tannhäuser* overture in 1846 and pronounced it "quite atrocious, incredibly awkward in construction, long and tedious for such a sensible person. . . . He is no longer young and inexperienced, and it seems to me that a man who will not only write such a thing, but actually have it engraved, has little call for

[1] An amusing illustration of this popular craving for "happy endings" is to be found in the theatrical chronicles of Hamburg. The nerves of some of the spectators were so much affected by the first performance of Shakespeare's *Othello* that the city fathers ordered the manager to alter the end of the play. So Othello and Desdemona "kiss and make up," and everybody leaves the theatre happy! By a curious coincidence another *Tannhäuser*, with a happy ending, was written about the same time as Wagner's, and independently of it, by Mangold; but its happy ending did not keep it above water.

an artistic career."[1] This is the same overture which Mendelssohn is said to have once conducted at a Gewandhaus concert as "a warning example"; the same overture concerning which the London *Times* of May 14, 1855, (*ten* years after the Dresden *première,*) wrote: "Nothing is known in this country excepting the overture of *Tannhäuser,* which was heard with equal indifference by the public in the concerts of the New Philharmonic and Mr. Jullien, and is, at the best, but a commonplace display of noise and extravagance"; the same overture of which the distinguished French critic Fétis wrote that it begins with "a poor choral, badly harmonized. . . . This choral is the only spark of melody in the whole piece, and what a melody!"

If the overture fared so badly at the hands of the critics, one can imagine what became of the opera itself under their treatment — a treatment which varied but little in the different cities and remained unchanged for two or three decades. A correspondent at Frankfurt wrote in 1853 (Feb. 15) that "the last performance was

[1] One can imagine how sarcastically this amiable old pedant (who called Weber, as well as Gluck and Wagner, an "amateur") would have smiled had any one predicted to him that long before the end of the century the profits on the sales of this overture in the various arrangements would alone suffice to support a publisher with a pretty large family. How great the popularity of this overture is to-day even in England, which has not exactly kept in the van in the growing appreciation of Wagner, may be inferred from the account given in the London *Saturday Review* a few years ago of one of Mr. Manns's Crystal Palace Concerts, at which the audience was allowed to vote for the instrumental pieces on the programme. "Of symphonies the choice fell on Beethoven's Pastoral. . . . In the overtures, however, Wagner scored a great triumph, that to *Tannhäuser* being accepted with 317 votes, while Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Rossini's *William Tell* secured second and third places, with 253 and 136 respectively."

given before an alarmingly small audience. Conductor and director are undecided whether they should continue giving Wagner's operas!" Somewhat later it was announced that "*Tannhäuser*, so far as the public is concerned, may be considered a thing of the past, whereas Flotow's *Indra* has become a drawing card [*Kassenoper*]." A Berlin critic declared that "Wagner's music is a great musical *sin*, which the public will no more pardon than the Pope pardoned Tannhäuser's sins."[1] "An opera without song" is what Dr. Schlüter in his History of Music (1865) calls *Tannhäuser*. Otto Jahn, the biographer of Mozart, published a savage attack on *Tannhäuser* in the *Grenzboten* (1853). He admits that the text is greatly superior to the ordinary librettos, and then goes on to devote six pages to what he considers its faults, while not a line is given to its merits! The music fares quite as badly, if not worse, its merits being nowhere alluded to except in the last sentence, where they are summed up in two condescending words *einiges gelungen* — "A few successful details." So far from being music of the future, he concludes, "it is not even good enough for the present" (1853). We shall meet this eminent Mozart biographer again in the chapter on *Lohengrin*.

The English critics, as soon as they got a chance at

[1] These three choice specimens are translated from Tappert, who, in his Wagner biography, and especially in his *Wagner Lexicon*, has gathered many other amusing "criticisms" on Wagner and his music. This *Lexicon* is simply a collection of coarse and insulting epithets hurled against Wagner. Although it is a pamphlet of forty-eight pages, it is very far from being complete, as I have in my own note and scrap books material enough for another pamphlet of the same size. Some of the most edifying of these are quoted in this chapter and following ones as a sort of *relevé* between the æsthetic and biographic courses.

Wagner, were determined not to be outdone by their German colleagues. The historian, John Hullah, wrote: "I find in the pieces of which *Tannhäuser* is composed an entire absence of musical construction and coherence (!); little melody, and that of the most *mesquin* kind; and harmony chiefly remarkable for its restless, purposeless, and seemingly helpless modulation." Much more spicy are the remarks of the eminent critic H. F. Chorley: "I have never been so blanked, pained, wearied, *insulted* even (the word is not too strong), by a work of pretension as by this same *Tannhäuser*," the music of which is "in entire discordance with its subject" (!); "when a tune (!) had presented itself he used it without caring for its fitness." (Did Chorley get his notes of a Wagner and a Donizetti opera mixed up?) Of the great narrative in the third act he says: "I remember the howling, whining, bawling of Herr Tichatschek — to sing or vocally declaim this scene is impossible." "The instrumentation is singularly unpleasant" (!). Finally, the opera is summed up as "shrill noise, and abundance of what a wit with so happy a disrespect designated 'broken crockery effects' — things easy enough to be produced by those whose audacity is equal to their eccentricity."

But it is in their favorite rôle of Prophets that Wagner's critics become most amusing. To the unconverted[1] or to those unfamiliar with the opera, the humor of the foregoing "criticisms" may not be as obvious, or at

[1] That there are such still, even in the musical centre known as Boston, is shown by the fact that the critic of the *Home Journal* of that city not long ago summed up his opinion of *Tannhäuser* in these words: "Dramatically, it is slow and devoid of interest; *musically, it is brutal.*" His name is Philip Hale; *he signed it!* Date: April 12, 1890.

least not so vivid, as it might be; but when it comes to the prophesies we deal with jokes which are vivified for everybody by what is usually a most dry subject; namely, statistics. Official statistics show that in the operatic year for July 1, 1889, to July 1, 1890, *Tannhäuser* was performed 189 times in German theatres alone, and 247 times in 1890–91. It has had over three hundred performances in Berlin and over two hundred in several other German cities.

Half a dozen of these prophecies may serve as samples. Let us take them chronologically.

1846: The author of a book called *Dresden und die Dresdener* writes: "Wagner is no artist, either in taste or in creativeness. *Time will judge!*"

1847: Moritz Hauptmann writes: "I do not believe that of Wagner's compositions a *single one* will survive him."

1852: Fétis (père) has three articles on Wagner in the *Gazette Musicale*, concerning which Wagner writes to Uhlig (*Letters*, No. 67): "He claims 'exact information,' and asserts, for example, that my *Tannhäuser* in Dresden had by the *third* performance become such a failure that it could *never*, by any possibility, be revived." (*Tannhäuser* had its *hundredth* performance in Dresden in 1872.)

1856: Dr. E. Schmidt (Berlin) calls *Tannhäuser* a *Dissonanz-Musik* which will disappear after the second performance.

1862: A Paris correspondent of the *Signale*, reviewing the *Tannhäuser* performances, writes: "We are happily done with this nonsense, which in Germany, too, will not continue much longer to excite angry debates."

1875: Fétis writes in his *Biographie des Musiciens:* "The ridicule with which the Parisians covered his *Tannhäuser* has not been without its influence on public opinion, for since 1861 there has been a noticeable decline in the Wagner movement in Germany." (The first Bayreuth festival was in 1876!)

And so on, up to the present day; for, as I said in the chapter on the *Dutchman,* some of the Prophets are still at their trade, or, if they have given up the early operas as hopelessly popular, they now make all the more dire predictions about *Tristan* and the *Nibelung's Ring.* All of which reminds one of Artemus Ward's kangaroo, which was "an amoosin' but onprincipled cuss."[1]

LISZT, SPOHR, AND SCHUMANN

As *Tannhäuser* is now accepted everywhere as a masterwork, it is hardly worth while to try to offset the foregoing criticisms by quoting the opinions of real critics. It is of interest to see, however, what three of Wagner's greatest colleagues thought of this opera.

Liszt, who was the first Kapellmeister to bring out *Tannhäuser,* which had been universally ignored for four years after its *première* in Dresden, also wrote an admirable critical analysis of it in which occur these sentences: —

"As the text of *Tannhäuser* is written with deep poetic feeling, and constitutes in itself an affecting drama, full of the most subtle

[1] The managers were determined not to be outdone by the newspaper critics. Thus, while a Dresden critic declared that the opera was too "dramatic," a Leipzig critic said it was too "lyric," and Manager von Küstner of Berlin refused the score on the ground that it was "too epic" (Tappert in *Musikal. Wochenblatt,* July 20, 1877).

shades of sentiment and passion; as its plot is original and boldly conceived, the verses beautiful, often very beautiful, full of sudden flashes of sublime and powerful emotion, — so the music likewise is new, and demands special consideration."

"However great as a poet he may be, it is nevertheless only in the music that he finds the means for the complete expression of his feelings, — so complete, in fact, that he alone can tell us whether he adapts his words to his melodies, or seeks melodies for his words."[1]

Spohr, who had been the first to adopt the *Dutchman* for his theatre at Cassel, would have also anticipated Liszt with *Tannhäuser* if he could have had his own way. He wanted to bring it out at the birthday of the Kurprinz, but could not get permission, which led him to write a letter to Wagner expressing his great disappointment. Some time later he wrote again, proposing a *rendezvous* at Leipzig, which Wagner joyously accepted. The following letter, printed in Spohr's *Autobiography*, is of special interest, as it gives us a glimpse of Wagner's personality, and social life at this time. It refers to a dinner at the house of Wagner's brother-in-law, the publisher Brockhaus, at which Laube also was present: —

"Best of all we liked Wagner, who appears to me more amiable every time I meet him, and whose liberal culture and universal knowledge compel us to admire him more and more. Among other things he gave us his views on political matters with a warm enthusiasm which truly surprised us, and pleased us all the more as his views were of a very liberal kind. The evening we passed most pleasantly at the Mendelssohns', who did everything they could to make themselves agreeable to Spohr, whose last quartet was played, Mendelssohn and Wagner following it in the score with an expression of delight."

[1] As a matter of fact, he did neither, but generally conceived them simultaneously, as we shall see in a later chapter.

In 1853, Spohr at last succeeded in producing *Tannhäuser* at Cassel. He was then seventy-nine years of age, but not too old to be humble and learn to like what at first seemed eccentric (as works of genius that create a new epoch always do): —

"The opera contains much that is new and beautiful," he wrote, "also several ugly attacks on one's ears." Concerning these, however, he adds: "A good deal that I disliked at first I have got accustomed to on repeated hearing; only the absence of definite rhythms and the frequent lack of rounded periods continue to disturb me."

Among the great musicians whom Wagner knew personally was Robert Schumann, equally famous as composer and as critic — a critic who made a sort of specialty of the "discovery" of new geniuses (Chopin, Berlioz, Brahms, Franz, etc.), and whose opinion of Wagner must therefore be of especial interest. This opinion, however, underwent such extraordinary fluctuations that it was obviously influenced somewhat by non-musical considerations. Thus in 1845 he wrote to Mendelssohn concerning *Tannhäuser*: —

"Wagner has just finished a new opera: no doubt a clever fellow, full of eccentric notions, and bold beyond measure. The aristocracy is still in raptures over him on account of his *Rienzi*, but in reality he cannot conceive or write four consecutive bars of good or even correct music. What all these composers lack is the art of writing pure harmonies and four-part choruses. The music is *not a straw better* than that of *Rienzi*, — *rather weaker*, more artificial! But if I wrote this I should be accused of envy; hence I say it only to you, as I am aware that you have known all this a long time."

Three weeks later, however, he writes again: —

"I must take back much of what I wrote regarding *Tannhäuser*, after reading the score; on the stage the effect is quite different. I was deeply moved by many parts."

To another friend, Heinrich Dorn, he writes a few weeks later still: —

"I wish you could see Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. It contains profound and original ideas, and is *a hundred times better* than his previous operas, though some of the music is trivial. In a word, he may become of great importance to the stage, and, so far as I know him, he has the requisite courage. The technical part, the instrumentation, I find excellent, incomparably more masterly than formerly."

So the same opera which, on imperfect acquaintance, strikes Schumann as being "not a straw better" than *Rienzi*, turns out, at the performance, to be "a hundred times better"! Eight years later he once more returned to the subject and delivered this extraordinary criticism: —

"Wagner is, if I may express myself briefly, not a good musician; he lacks the sense of form and euphony (!). But you must not judge him by piano-scores. There are many places in his operas which, if you could hear them on the stage, would certainly move you deeply. And though it be not the clear sunlight that emanates from genius, still it is a secret magic that takes possession of our senses. But, as I have said, the music, apart from the representation, is weak, often simply amateurish, empty and disagreeable; and it is a sad proof of corrupt taste that in the face of the many dramatic masterworks which Germany has produced, some persons have the presumption to belittle these in favor of Wagner's. Yet enough of this. The future will pronounce judgment in this matter, too."

It *has* pronounced judgment — as witness the thousand and more performances of Wagner's operas now given annually, four decades after Schumann's prophecy. The

most extraordinary thing in the above criticism is the charge that Wagner has no sense of euphony — Wagner, who has charmed into existence a whole tropical garden of gorgeous, fragrant flowers of undreamt-of beauty and colors!

But the cause of Schumann's aversion to Wagner lies deeper. It is the same old story of the lyric composer condemning the dramatic, and *vice versa*, with which readers of the biographies of Weber, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Handel, Gluck, etc., are familiar. In Schumann's case this attitude was aggravated by professional jealousy; for he too had written an opera, *Genoveva*, which, being undramatic, was an utter failure, while Wagner's operas became more and more popular year by year. On this subject Wagner himself has given us some interesting revelations in one of his last essays (Vol. X. pp. 222, 223): —

"My successes at the Dresden Court Theatre attracted, among others, F. Hiller and R. Schumann into my neighborhood, primarily, perhaps, only to find out how it happened that a hitherto unknown German composer could persistently attract the public at one of the most important German opera-houses. That I was not much of a musician these two friends soon believed to have discovered; hence they fancied that my success must be attributed to the text-books written by myself. I, too, was, indeed, of the opinion that they, since both were planning the composition of an opera, should be advised, above all things, to provide themselves with good poems. My assistance was asked for, but when it came to the decisive moment, it was declined, presumably from fear that I might play mean tricks on them. Concerning my *Lohengrin* text Schumann declared that it was not suitable for operatic composition,[1] wherein he differed from Conductor-in-chief Taubert, in

[1] Schumann himself was meditating an opera on the same subject, and was therefore unpleasantly surprised when Wagner one day showed him his completed *Lohengrin* poem, — another source of critical "tears" (see letter to Mendelssohn, Nov. 18, 1845).

Berlin, who later on, when my music to this opera had also been completed and performed, declared that he felt like composing the text once more, for himself. When Schumann was arranging his own *Genoveva* text I found it impossible to persuade him to give up the unfortunate and silly third act as he had conceived it; he became angry, and obviously believed that I intended by my interference to spoil his most brilliant effects. For *effects* were what he was after," etc.

Elsewhere Wagner speaks of Schumann's "shallow bombast," his "obscurity," his "limited faculties"; and in a conversation[1] he once exclaimed: "Schumann was, after all, a dear good German fellow with a certain tendency to greatness!" — whence we see that there was not much love lost — more's the pity! — between these two composers. Yet, on the other side, Wagner (VIII. 317) admits Schumann to have been "the most gifted and poetic" musician of the period following Beethoven; and, finally, it must be remembered that here, as in the case of Mendelssohn, *it was not Wagner who threw the first stone.*

[1] Reported by Wolzogen, *Erinnerungen an Wagner*, p. 34.

REVOLUTION — ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL

CREATION OF LOHENGRIN

GENIUS has been defined as "an infinite capacity for taking pains." One of Wagner's most striking traits certainly was an extraordinary restlessness and love of work. Hardly had he completed *Tannhäuser* when the sketches for *Lohengrin* and *Die Meistersinger* were put on paper, within a few weeks, during an excursion to the mountains "*for rest.*" Hear his own story (IV. 349): —

"Immediately after the composition of *Tannhäuser* I had an opportunity to make an excursion, for my recreation, to a Bohemian bathing-resort. Here, as always when I escaped the atmosphere of the footlights and my official 'duties,' I soon felt relieved and happy; for the first time a kind of humor [*Heiterkeit*, gayety] peculiar to my character assumed an artistic form. With almost arbitrary deliberateness I had been gradually making up my mind to choose a *comic* subject for my next opera; I remember that I was assisted in this intention by the well-meant advice of good friends, who wished me to compose an opera of a 'lighter genre,' which might help to introduce me in the German theatres, and thus lead up to a financial success, the need of which had begun to assume a threatening importance. As with the Athenians a merry satyr-play followed the tragedy, so, during that excursion, I suddenly conceived the idea of a comic play which might follow my Minstrels' Contest in the Wartburg as a significant satyr-play.

This was the Mastersingers of Nuremberg, with Hans Sachs at their head. . . .

"Scarcely had I finished the sketch of this plot when the plan of *Lohengrin* began to engage my attention, and left me no rest until I had worked it out in detail. This was done during the same short summer excursion, in disobedience to my physician's orders not to busy myself with such things."

The subject of *Lohengrin*, being more in harmony with his mood, occupied him first, and it is one of the greatest marvels in the history of art that the music of this opera, so rich, so melodious, so novel in every way, was composed in less than a year. In the first sketch of the score Wagner has written the exact dates with his own hand. The third act was written first, between Sept. 9, 1846, and March 5, 1847. Then came the first act, May 12 to June 8; and, last of all, the second act, June 18 to Aug. 2, 1847. The instrumentation was completed the following winter and spring.

WHY WAGNER BECAME A REBEL

A masterwork had been created, but the world did not want it. Although Wagner remained royal conductor in Dresden for two years after the completion of *Lohengrin*, and although the Opera there had an almost ideal cast for it, — Schroeder-Devrient, Johanna Wagner, Tichatschek, and Mitterwurzer, — he did not succeed in getting it accepted for performance. Not till three years later did it have its first performance — at Weimar; while the Dresdeners did not hear it till 1859 — twelve years after its creation; and Wagner himself had to wait two further years till he could hear *Lohengrin* for the first time — at Vienna.

Yet he knew in 1847, as well as the whole world knows to-day, that he had composed an immortal music-drama. Evidently things were not going with him as they should,—there was something rotten in Denmark, and time was out of joint. True, the new score appeared very difficult, and its author insisted on having for it increased orchestral forces; but had he not a right, after the evidence he had given of his genius in *Tannhäuser*, to ask for special consideration? Nor was the neglect of *Lohengrin* by any means the only cause of dissatisfaction. Once more, after a short period of prosperity, everything and everybody seemed to turn against him. Although *Tannhäuser* had been revived the year after its first production, with increased success, all efforts to get it accepted in other cities failed, and for four years *Tannhäuser* remained unknown outside Dresden, till Liszt brought it out at Weimar. From Berlin the score had been returned with the verdict that the opera was "too epic," and when Wagner, relying on the King's love of music, tried to make a more direct appeal to him, the authorities advised him to make his music known to his Majesty by arranging portions of it for the military band. "More deeply I surely could not have been humiliated and forced to appreciate my real position."

The *Flying Dutchman*, too, after a brief career in Dresden, Cassel, Riga, and Berlin, had disappeared entirely, and for nine years was not again sung. Even the sensational *Rienzi* failed at Berlin and at Hamburg.[1] Wagner

[1] At Hamburg this opera had only been accepted at the urgent solicitation of tenor Tichatschek, who stipulated that the manager should give him an opportunity to sing six times in *Rienzi*, or forfeit 2000

sent out all his scores to various managers: some returned them with a note saying they were too difficult, while others returned them without even opening the packages (IV. 344). To him this was a most serious disappointment, for more than one reason: not only was his artistic ambition ungratified, but he found himself involved in grave financial trouble. An author, in the first and most impetuous years of his career, is naturally sanguine as to the brilliant future of his works, and Wagner's confidence in his own future had been strengthened by the success of *Rienzi*. This led him into the rash venture of publishing his operatic scores, partly on his own responsibility; and when the operas failed to "make the round" of the theatres, this venture naturally proved a financial failure. How far his confidence in his works went, may be inferred from this passage in one of Moritz Hauptmann's letters (1847): "Wagner has had the scores of his operas, in his own handwriting, engraved at once on stone, and thus published in a lithographic edition; *Tannhäuser* even before the first rehearsal."

The fifth letter in the correspondence with Liszt throws such an interesting light on Wagner's situation that it must be cited entire: —

"You informed me lately that you had closed your piano for some time to come: so I presume that you have become a banker. My affairs are in a bad way, and the thought has flashed on me that you might perhaps help me. — The publication of my three operas was undertaken on my own responsibility: the capital I borrowed of several parties; now I have received notice on all sides, and I cannot subsist another week, for every attempt to sell

thalers. The *Signale*, which prints this item, adds maliciously that "Manager Cornet, having now heard the opera, is said to be in a state of consternation over this agreement" (Tappert, p. 22).

this peculiar business, even for cost price, has in the present hard times resulted in failure. Various complications have made the matter very dangerous to me, and I ask myself secretly what is to become of me. The sum at stake is 5000 thalers [almost $4000]: after deducting returns, and waiving all profit, this is the sum invested in the publication of my operas. — Can you provide the money? Have you got it, or do you know any one who would advance it for your sake? Would it not be interesting if you became the publisher of my works? Friend Meser would continue the business on your account as honestly as on mine: a lawyer would arrange matters. And do you know what would be the result? I would again be a man, — a man whose existence has been rendered possible, — an artist who never again in all his life will have anything to do with money affairs, but only work on joyfully. Dear Liszt, with this money you ransom me from slavery! Do I seem worth that sum as a serf?"

The "Friend Meser" alluded to in this letter was of course the publisher of the three scores; and about him the local wits had their little joke. Before issuing *Rienzi*, they said, he lived in the first story; the *Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser* took him up to the second and third, and *Lohengrin* would drive him up to the garret. But Meser refused to have anything to do with the fourth score, and thus escaped the garret; while Wagner was more than ever convinced that time was out of joint. His duties as conductor were irksome because the repertory consisted chiefly of the works of Donizetti, Flotow, and others of that kind. Creative work alone gave him true satisfaction and pleasure, and so, after the completion of *Lohengrin*, we find him again in the midst of operatic projects. One of these was the plan of a music-drama on the subject of Jesus of Nazareth, which, however, he soon gave up as impracticable; doubtless not without a pang of regret, as the material which he col-

lected for this drama was so extensive that it forms a volume of one hundred pages which has been issued separately.[1] It is of interest as containing some of the germs of *Parsifal;* and in Vol. IV. (402–405) Wagner discourses on his intentions, and on the mood in which he conceived this plan, which was a thoroughly pessimistic one.

Another dramatic project of this period which he never completed was based on the story of "Friedrich Rothbart." He soon realized that it could be used only as a literary drama, and on this occasion he became more convinced than ever that the only proper subject for a music-drama was a mythical one. The legend of Siegfried occupied his mind more and more, and ended by routing the historic plan — the last time, as he says, that history and mythology conflicted in his mind. The result of his historic studies in connection with Friedrich are printed in Vol. II. (151–199), under the title "Die Wibelungen. Weltgeschichte aus der Sage." And immediately after this essay comes the "Nibelung Myth, a Sketch for a Drama" — which foreshadows the whole story of the *Nibelung's Ring,* and is followed by "Siegfried's Death," a complete drama which he afterwards remodelled and converted into *Die Götterdämmerung.* Concerning this drama, he says (IV. 402): —

"My poem, 'Siegfried's Death,' I had sketched and versified solely in order to satisfy an inner craving, and by no means with the idea of getting it performed in our theatres and with the means at hand in them, which I had to pronounce inadequate in every sense. . . . At that time, in 1848, I did not think of the possibility

[1] *Jesus von Nazareth,* von R. Wagner. Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1887.

of its performance, but looked upon its execution in verse, and the addition of a few musical fragments, only as a personal gratification with which I was anxious to refresh myself in this period, when I loathed public affairs and lived in retirement from them."

REFORM OR REVOLUTION?

Reasons enough have now been given to show why Wagner rebelled against the existing order of things; but he made one more great effort before throwing himself entirely into the revolutionary movement which had made France a republic, and was spreading over the Continent. The air was full of reform projects; and one of these projected "reforms" excited Wagner's alarm and satisfaction at the same time. He heard that there was a movement to abolish the annual subvention granted to the Court Theatre, on the ground that it was merely "a place of luxurious entertainment." Now this view of the Dresden Theatre coincided exactly with his own, that the theatre, in Dresden as elsewhere, had gradually been degraded into a mere commercial speculation, the function of which was to supply the public with amusement and opportunity to pass away time — as a surrogate for cards and billiards. But should the theatre for that reason be given up as lost, and eventually deprived of state assistance and patronage? That, surely, would be as unreasonable as it would have been for the church authorities, two centuries before, to banish all music from the church because sacred music had degenerated; and, just as Palestrina had saved church music by showing that masses could be composed that were dignified and interesting at the same time, so Wagner — who, of course, does not use this comparison — proposed

a plan which would make the Opera House a real art-institute, worthy of state support, and keeping up to Emperor Joseph's maxim: —

"THE THEATRE SHOULD HAVE NO OTHER OBJECT THAN TO ASSIST IN THE REFINEMENT OF TASTE AND MORALS."

Wagner himself prints this in large type; for the theatre was his hobby, his idol; that is, the *ideal* theatre, not the actual theatre in which not even his *Lohengrin* could be performed. Accordingly he set to work and drew up an elaborate scheme for the organization of an ideal National Theatre, which was to be managed on artistic principles, and not as a commercial speculation dependent on the whims and tastes of the vulgar crowd. This scheme, which takes up no less than fifty pages of fine print (Vol. II. pp. 309–359), gives an excellent insight into the practical side of Wagner's genius: no detail is neglected, from the function of manager and conductor down to the humblest fiddler and chorus-singer; and the financial side also is carefully taken into consideration. Some of his suggestions (for each of which convincing reasons are given) are that the weekly performances should be limited to a number consistent with the possibility of proper rehearsals; that entr'acte music should be abolished; that the managers should be specialists no less than the conductors and singers; that newspaper critics should be abolished (fact! see p. 315); travelling companies suppressed; dramatic and musical schools established for fresh supplies of artists; the Leipzig conservatory transferred to Dresden (this idea made Wagner many enemies in Leipzig); the opera orchestra relieved of service in church, where pure vocal

music *à la* Palestrina was to be restored, and women admitted as singers; the whole organization to be placed under the authority of the Minister of Public Worship; and so on.

In the preface to this scheme (written many years later) Wagner remarks that the reader of his literary works will find him for a number of years constantly resuming this idea of elevating the theatre to the dignity of an art-institute: "he will perhaps be surprised at the persistence with which I endeavored in each case to adapt the plan to local circumstances.[1] That it never received any attention will perhaps also surprise him." In 1849 it certainly received no attention, and when he got back the manuscript, he even found derisive marginal notes on it — the only reward for all his thought and labor! Reform was obviously impossible; what was there left but revolution? So he became a revolutionist and a member of secret societies.

In one of these societies, the Vaterlandsverein, Wagner delivered, on June 14, 1848, a fiery address which was printed as a newspaper extra[2] and contains some remarkably bold statements. In it Wagner demanded, besides general suffrage, nothing less than the complete abolishment of the aristocracy as well as of the standing army, and the proclamation of Saxony as a republic by the King himself, who was to remain its president! This speech was printed anonymously, but everybody knew who was its author, and, strange to say, he did not get into trouble on account of it. "A two weeks' leave of absence, which

[1] He alludes to the essays on "A Theatre in Zürich" and "The Vienna Opera House," in Vols. V. and VII.

[2] Reprinted by Tappert, 33-42. English in Praeger, 157-164.

Wagner requested, a few interviews and letters,—and the matter was dropped," says Tappert.

But the red republican flame continued to burn in Wagner's mind, and when, a year later (May, 1849), the insurrection broke out in Dresden, he joined hands with the rioters. The streets were barricaded by the rebels, the royal troops repulsed, and the King himself hastily left the city. The triumph, however, was brief, for on the following day Prussian troops arrived to succor the King of Saxony, and Wagner, with his friends, Semper and Kinkel, had to seek safety in flight, while others of the revolutionaries, including his friend Roeckel and the Russian Bakunin, were captured, imprisoned, and condemned to be shot.

Apart from the general incidents of the revolution, which belong to military history, this meagre outline of the facts is about all that the biographers of Wagner (with the exception of Praeger) have been able to tell their readers up to date. The testimony of witnesses as to details did not agree. Some declared that Wagner had been seen fighting on the barricades, in such and such a street; others spread the report that he himself had set fire to the old opera-house, which was consumed by flames during the insurrection. On the other hand, one of the insurgents, Stephan Born, wrote after Wagner's death that the composer was not even in Dresden at the time of the uprising, but at Chemnitz; and that on his return to that city, after a revolutionary errand to Freiberg, he and his companions were warned not to stop at the hotel; that the two companions paid no heed to this warning, and were arrested, while Wagner, who was staying with his brother-in-law, escaped. Mr. Dann-

reuther, an intimate friend of the composer, writes (Grove, IV. 357) that "the tale of his having carried a red flag and fought on the barricades, is not corroborated by the 'acts of accusation' preserved in the Saxon Police Records." Another biographer, R. Pohl, whom the "Meister" himself used to call "the oldest Wagnerite," says that "Richard Wagner did not stand on the barricades, as has been asserted, but he had undertaken the 'musical direction' of the revolution; he led the signals, the alarm bells; he also organized the convoys coming in from outside, and by his words encouraged them to fight" (p. 42). A similar account was given by Wagner's wife to the novelist Frau Eliza Wille (*Deutsche Rundschau*, May, 1887, p. 263): "My husband did not incur any guilt. He only looked out from the tower for the convoys from the villages, which were to come to assist the citizens. He did *not* stand on the barricades, as was related of him; he had shouldered no musket, had only been able to save himself by flight when the Prussian military entered Dresden."

Wagner himself did not satisfactorily elucidate this episode in any of his copious writings, and it is not likely that all the facts will be authoritatively known until his three-volume autobiography (which his widow is still guarding as jealously as Fafner guarded his treasure) is given to the world. In the letters to Liszt there are several references to this revolutionary episode in his life, but as Wagner's object, in writing about them to Liszt, was to enlist his aid in securing amnesty and permission to return to Germany, it was inevitable that he should present the facts as an *advocate*, in as favorable a light as possible, and not as an impartial witness. As

letters were frequently opened at that time, it would have been rash and dangerous for him to write to Liszt the details of occurrences that might have been used as evidence against him. A few passages from the letters to Liszt may, however, be quoted, as presenting Wagner's side of the case. On April 13, 1856, he wrote: —

"In regard to that riot and its sequels, I am willing to confess that I now consider myself to have been in the wrong at that time, and carried away by my passions, although I am conscious of not having committed any crime that would properly come before the courts, so that it would be difficult for me to confess to any such."

It worried him particularly to be accused of ingratitude toward the King of Saxony, who had given him a position, and had always been kind to him.[1] Thus he wrote to Liszt shortly after his flight, under date July 19, 1849: —

"One thing annoys me very much and pains me to the bone: the frequent reproach of ingratitude toward the King. . . . That he paid me 1500 thalers for conducting a number of poor operas for him every year, at the Intendant's order, was indeed too much: yet I found herein less cause for gratitude than for dissatisfaction with my whole position. That for the best I could do he did not pay me anything, is a circumstance that did not call for *gratitude:* that, on the occasion when I gave him a real opportunity to help me radically, he did not — or could not — help me, but calmly discussed with his Intendant the advisability of my dismissal — is a matter which quieted my conscience regarding my

[1] For example, the *Berliner Musikalische Zeitung*, No. 31, 1844, has this item: "Under the direction of Reissiger & Rich. Wagner, 106 instrumentalists and 200 vocalists went to Pillnitz to serenade the King with a patriotic song composed by Wagner. The King spoke in the most appreciative terms of the excellent piece." Wagner is also said to have been under special obligations to the King's sister.

dependence on royal favors. Finally, I am conscious of the fact that, even if I had had special grounds for gratitude toward the King of Saxony, I did not, to my knowledge, commit any act of ingratitude toward him: of this I could bring the proofs."

Four weeks before this he had written to Liszt to assure him that his undisguised sympathy with the Dresden revolt was

"far removed from that ludicrous fanaticism which sees in every royal personage an object to be persecuted. . . . You know the bitter spring of dissatisfaction which came to me from my practical connection with my dear art — a spring which, growing in volume, finally overflowed into that sphere (politics) the connection of which with the bottom of my deep displeasure I could not fail to fathom. Hence arose a violent impulse which is expressed in the words, 'There must be a change; it cannot continue like this.'"

In Vol. IV. (308) of his Collected Writings he brings out still more clearly what precipitated him into the revolution: —

"From my artistic point of view, especially with reference to a reorganization of the Theatre, I had thus got to the point of recognizing the unavoidable necessity of the revolution of 1848." And in a footnote he adds defiantly: "I give especial prominence to this fact here, regardless of the impression it may make on those who poke fun at me as 'a revolutionist in behalf of the theatre.'"

No doubt there is something funny in the idea of joining in a political revolution for the sake of theatrical reform. Wagner was a fanatic for the theatre, if you choose. If there were more such fanatics, there would be more immortal dramas and music-dramas.

How little Wagner cared for politics as such, and therefore for the political side of the revolution, may also be inferred from this line in the tenth letter to Fischer: —

"In my book, *Oper und Drama*, which will appear shortly, you will read, to your comfort, that I do not consider true art possible *until politics cease to exist!*"

The view here presented, that Wagner was not naturally a politician, and that he was driven into the revolution, not by hatred of his king, but by purely *artistic* considerations, and by despair at the sorry state of his personal prospects, is fully borne out by the interesting and important revelations made by the late Ferdinand Praeger in his *Wagner as I Knew Him* (1892), which help to explain why Wagner temporarily abandoned music for politics. What the insurgents were fighting for were freedom of the press, trial by jury, national armies, and political representatives. These boons must have appeared as desirable to Wagner as to any other high-spirited and freedom-loving man; yet there can be no doubt that if he could have had his own way in regard to *operatic reforms*, he would have left political revolutions to the care of others. Praeger's testimony on this point bears out this view: "Wagner's heart," he says, "as that of all men, revolted at the cause, but *had it not been for the 'companion of my solitude,' as Wagner calls Roeckel, he would never have taken so active a part in the struggle for liberty.* Upon this point I cannot lay too much stress."

Who was this Roeckel? He was assistant-conductor at the Dresden Opera. He was a nephew of Hummel, the famous composer and pianist, and his father was the impresario who first introduced a complete German opera troupe to London; and who, at one time, was tutored by Beethoven for the part of Florestan in *Fidelio*. August Roeckel inherited a good share of the family talent for

music. It was the display of this talent in his opera *Farinelli* that led to his appointment as assistant-director at the Dresden Opera. But when he became familiar with Wagner's operatic music, the conviction of his own inferiority became so strong in him that he voluntarily took back that opera and refused to allow its performance. Henceforth he became Wagner's "shadow," as Praeger calls him, his constant companion at home and in the theatre. When Wagner — disgusted at the fate of *Tannhäuser* and the *Dutchman;* overwhelmed with debts by their failure to make their way in other cities, and the accumulation of the scores he had had printed at his own expense; harassed by ignorant critics, pedants and Philistines on all sides — withdrew from the world to compose his *Lohengrin,* Roeckel was his only intimate, and he was, with Uhlig, the first mortal who saw its immortal pages.

Roeckel, fortunately, had another intimate friend of his youth, Ferdinand Praeger, who at that time lived in London. Roeckel was a good correspondent, and to this circumstance we owe some pleasant glimpses of Wagner as he was at Dresden during the *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* epoch.

From these letters a few passages may here be quoted. The first is dated March, 1843.

"Henceforth I drop myself into a well, because I am going to speak of the man whose greatness overshadows that of all other men I have met, either in France or England, — our new friend, Richard Wagner. I say advisedly, our friend, for he knows you from my description as well as I do. You cannot imagine how the daily intercourse with him develops my admiration for his genius. His earnestness in art is religious; he looks upon the drama as the

pulpit from which the people should be taught, and his views on the combination of the different arts for that purpose open up an exciting theory as new as it is ideal. You would love him, aye, worship him as I do, for *to gigantic powers of intellect he unites the sportive playfulness of a child.* I have a great advantage over him in piano-playing. It seems strange, but his playing is ludicrously defective; so much so, that when anything is to be tried I take the piano, and my sight-reading seems to please him vastly."

In another letter he writes that he has refused an offer to go as first conductor to Bamberg, because he prefers to be second conductor under Richard Wagner.

"Such a man as Richard Wagner I never yet met, and you know I am not inclined to Cæsar's maxim, that it were better to be the first in a village than the second in Rome. I have begun to rescore my opera under Wagner's supervision; his frank criticism has opened my eyes to some very important instrumental defects. His notions of scoring are most novel, most daring, and altogether marvellous, but not more so than his elevated notions about the high purpose of the dramatic art; indeed, they foreshadow a new era in the history of art."

In several other interesting letters, Roeckel speaks of the Berliners who posed as profound art critics but were too stupid to see any merit in the *Flying Dutchman;* of Wagner's admirable conducting of works by Gluck and Marschner and by Mendelssohn; of the hubbub that was raised by the conservatives when Wagner, for the best of reasons, wished to rearrange the seating of the orchestra; of Spontini's visit, and the transfer of Weber's ashes; of the Intendant's preference of the third-rate Reissiger to Wagner, because Reissiger knew how to bow to his aristocratic acumen, while Wagner preached his own gospel. One more passage may be quoted: —

"The only ready ear beside myself is Semper, who, however, agrees with Wagner's outbursts only so far as they are applicable to his own art, architecture, as in music he is but a dilettante. Much of Wagner's earnestness in his demands for improvement in art matters is attributed by the opposition to self-glorification. At the head of it stands Reissiger, who cannot and will not accept the success of *Rienzi* as *bonâ fide*. He is forever hinting at some nefarious means, and cannot understand why his own operas should fail with the same public, unless, indeed, he stupidly adds, it is because he neglected to surround himself with a 'lifeguard of clacqueurs'; but he was a true German, and against such malpractices. You can imagine how such things annoy Wagner; and although he eventually laughs, it is not until they have left a scar somewhere. For myself, I wonder how he can mind such stuff. I keep it always from him, but nevertheless it always seems to reach him; and Minna is not capable of withholding either praise or blame from him, although I have tried hard to prove to her that it deeply affects her husband, whose health is none of the strongest. Another annoyance is the Leipzig clique, with Mendelssohn at the head, or, to put the matter into the right light, as the ruling spirit. He gives the watchword to the clique, and then sneaks out of sight, as if he lived in regions too refined and sublime to bother himself about terrestrial affairs."

These letters of Roeckel's might give the impression that he had effaced himself completely to become Wagner's "shadow." But this is only true of Roeckel the musician. In politics Roeckel was the leading spirit, and Wagner — unfortunately for his future — the shadow. Now a man of Wagner's strong individuality would not have been likely to play the rôle of shadow to any one but a hero: and that Roeckel had in him the material of which heroes are made is shown by what Count von Beust relates of him in his Memoirs.[1] The Count was desirous

[1] *Aus drei Viertel Jahrhunderten*, Vol. I. Chap. VII. pp. 77–80.

of pardoning Roeckel after he had been confined in prison almost thirteen years; but, he says: —

"King Johann firmly insisted that a pardon should be granted to those only who had petitioned for it. Roeckel, whose death-sentence had been commuted to imprisonment for life, was the only one who refused to submit to this condition, and his resistance at last became a real source of perplexity. One day I succeeded in obtaining from the King his pardon without the petition. It cannot be denied, I took the liberty of saying, that there is an antique trait in this persistence, and where, I added, is the reactionary who would remain in prison twelve years without being willing at last to speak a humble word? The King had to laugh, and yielded."

Von Beust adds that Roeckel requited this service with ingratitude by writing a brochure on the Waldheim prison,[1] in which the Count is represented as a tyrant. The Count also relates how he one day visited Roeckel in prison. He found him standing at a desk and writing: —

"When he noticed me he made a stiff, ceremonious bow, and then continued to write, with his back toward me, and without paying me any attention. There was nothing to prevent him from using the occasion of my presence for bringing forward his complaints. But the same Spartan trait which prevented him from handing in a petition for pardon may have incited frequent acts of insubordination on his part, followed by corresponding acts of discipline."

Such was the character of the "Spartan" friend who made a politician *pro tempore* of Richard Wagner, greatly to the latter's disadvantage. He was the editor of the Dresden *Volksblatt*, the people's organ, and Wagner con-

[1] *Sachsen's Erhebung und das Waldheimer Zuchthaus*, which contains a vivid narrative of the revolutionary incidents in which Wagner took part.

tributed to its columns, a fact which told against him when Roeckel's house was searched after his imprisonment. And now the question remains, on what precise grounds was Wagner prosecuted by the Saxon government and kept in exile for more than a decade? In other words, what rôle did Wagner play in the insurrection? We have seen why, in his letters to Liszt, he seeks to minimize his share in the revolt. On the other hand, in a letter (dated March 15, 1851) written to Eduard Roeckel (August's brother) in England, where there was no danger of correspondence being opened by the police, he speaks more freely of his share in those transactions: —

"Although I had not accepted a special rôle, yet I was present everywhere, actively superintending the bringing in of convoys, and, indeed, I only returned with one from the Erzgebirge to the town-hall, Dresden, on the eve of the last day. Then I was immediately asked on all sides after August, of whom since Monday evening no tidings had been received, and so, to our distress, we were forced to conclude that he had either been taken prisoner or shot.

"I was actively engaged in the revolutionary movement up to its final struggle, and it was a pure accident that I, too, was not taken prisoner in company with Heubner and Bakunin, as I had but taken leave of them for the night to meet in consultation again the next morning" (Praeger, 188–191).

If Wagner, by his own admission, was "actively engaged in the revolutionary movement up to its final struggle," it does not seem to me to make much difference whether he shouldered a musket, as Max Maria von Weber (the great composer's son) told Praeger he had seen him doing, or whether he only fired rockets, rang alarm bells, and made speeches. If his actions were rash and foolish, his motives were at any rate noble: he fought for a higher degree of political freedom, and for

a higher art-life. If all the men who have taken part in revolts on such grounds are to be condemned, Wagner will find himself in a multitudinous crowd of heroes. At the same time, it is as well to have the facts straight. Praeger's book contains several stories of Wagner's participation in the revolt which Mr. Ashton Ellis has shown, in a vigorous pamphlet,[1] to be unreliable, Richard Wagner having been mixed up with a journeyman-baker named Wagner, on which point documentary evidence is given by Mr. Ellis.

On one feature of his affair Mr. Ellis has thrown a flood of light which will interest politicians as well as musicians. It is well known that Count von Beust in his Memoirs gave an account of an interview he had with Wagner, in which he states, among other things, that Wagner had been condemned to death *in contumaciam;* that is, in his absence from court. He says also that it was through the intercession of the family of the tenor Tichatschek that he was induced to secure the King's pardon for Wagner. Then he describes the interview: —

"I greeted him with the words, 'I am glad to have been able to be of service to you; but I certainly hope you will not, in consequence, do anything disagreeable to me, therefore I beg you: no demonstrations.' — 'I do not understand you,' was his answer. 'Well,' I continued, 'you surely remember the events of 1849?' — 'Oh, that was an unfortunate misunderstanding!' — 'A misunderstanding? Perhaps you do not know that there is in the archives a sheet in your handwriting in which you boast of having set fire, fortunately without serious consequences, to the Prince's palace.'"

[1] 1849. *A Vindication.* London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892. Mr. Ellis is the editor of the London *Meister* and the translator of Wagner's Prose Writings.

Count von Beust evidently fancied that such a sublime being as a statesman need not behave like a gentleman in speaking to a mere man of genius. But leaving the question of manners aside, it is certainly suspicious that, as Mr. Ellis remarks, "the report of the interview is absolutely broken off *without a word of Wagner's reply!*" Regarding the statement that Wagner had been condemned to death *in contumaciam*, Mr. Ellis remarks: —

"However much von Beust might have approved of this summary method of dealing with distasteful absentees, even the Saxon authorities did not dare go so far, at least in the middle of this century, as to condemn a man to death *unheard*. . . . And now I would ask my readers to refer back to page 16, where they will see a reference to a *journeyman-baker, Wagner;* this young man *was* condemned to death for various acts of sedition, and is accused by Montbé of *incendiarism* (p. 269, *Der Mai Aufstand*). Surely, here is the key to the whole incident!"

It is now known, moreover, that it was the Grand Duke of Baden, and not the family of Tichatschek and Von Beust, who was responsible for Wagner's pardon. Von Beust disliked Wagner's music, and there can be no doubt that he, and not the King, was responsible for his long banishment; his attempt to make out that *he* was the real benefactor and liberator of the man he detested and persecuted, is what he probably considered "diplomatic"; others would choose a different word for such conduct. But we must now return to our narrative, the thread of which was dropped at the point when Wagner found that he must immediately leave Saxony if he would save his life or his liberty.

FLIGHT TO WEIMAR

Disguised as a coachman on a wagon brought to him by his sister-in-law, Wagner fled from Saxony. But where should he find an asylum? His mind was doubtless made up in a moment. Where else should he go but to Weimar? Here Franz Liszt, surrounded by geniuses and would-be geniuses, had made his home, which was destined to transform that city once more into the haunt of the Muses, as it had been when Goethe, Schiller, Herder, and other literary lions dwelt there. Liszt had determined to give up his career as pianist, and chosen the much less remunerative and more laborious path of conductor and orchestral composer. He had accepted the post of conductor of the Weimar opera, and one of his first acts (four months after his installation) was the production of *Tannhäuser*, which, although four years had passed since its first production in Dresden, had not been brought out in any other opera-house. And not only had Liszt produced it, but he had brought it out well, with an honest effort to follow out the composer's intentions, for which purpose the stage-manager Genast had been specially sent to Dresden to get Wagner's instructions regarding the scenery and other matters. Numbers 10 to 16 of the Correspondence with Liszt contain interesting details about this performance, on which we cannot dwell here further than to quote one line of Liszt's: "Herr von Zigesar has already written to you with what zeal and constantly growing admiration and sympathy we are studying your work"; and one line from Wagner's effusive and pathetic letter of thanks: "It

comes from the depth of my heart, and my eyes are full of tears as I write."

There could be no mistake, therefore, in going to Weimar, where Liszt would be sure to welcome him with open arms. Liszt had urgently invited him to attend the opening performance, but Wagner had been unable to obtain leave of absence: —

"In the same week," he writes, "in which you produced my *Tannhäuser* in Weimar, I was so grossly insulted by our Intendant that I struggled with myself several days whether I should continue, for the sake of the bread which my work here gives me, to expose myself to the most insulting treatment, and whether I should not give up art entirely, and earn my living by manual labor, rather than continue to be subjected to a malicious and ignorant despotism."

This was the culmination of a series of disappointments and annoyances which began shortly after his arrival in Dresden and had already, in 1847, reached such a point that he wrote to his friend F. Heine the following sentence, which deserves to be printed in italics, as it contains the key to Wagner's artistic character and, in fact, to the whole "Wagner Question": —

"*I am so filled with the deepest contempt for our contemporary theatric affairs, that, as I feel powerless to effect any reform, my most ardent desire is to get away from these things entirely; and I must consider it a real curse that all my creative impulses urge me to the production of dramatic works, since the wretched state of our theatres necessarily appears to me in the light of a hollow mockery of all my efforts.*"

Under such circumstances Wagner could hardly consider the necessity of his flight and the loss of his situation as a calamity, and we can understand the enthusiasm with which, in reviewing the situation two years later

(IV. 406), he exclaims that it was impossible to describe the sense of voluptuous delight which he felt at getting away from all these petty annoyances and blasted hopes: "for the first time in my life I felt absolutely free and happy, though I could not know where I should hide myself the next day in order to be allowed to breathe heaven's fresh air."

Liszt was no less delighted than surprised at this unexpected arrival of a man whom he had recognized through the score of *Tannhäuser* as one of the greatest living geniuses. A few letters had passed between the two, and they had met several times, but it was not till this occasion that their hearts were really opened towards each other, and the beginning was made of a friendship unequalled in cordiality and importance in the history of art, and without the existence of which the world would in all probability have never seen the better half of Wagner's music-dramas. It was Liszt who helped him with funds when he would otherwise have been compelled to stop composing and earn his bread like the commonest day-laborer; Liszt who sustained him with his approval when all the critical world was against him; Liszt who brought out his operas when all other conductors ignored them; Liszt who wrote letters — private and journalistic — about his friend's works and aims, besides three long enthusiastic essays on *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and the *Dutchman*, which were printed in German and French, and, with the Weimar performances of these operas, gave the first impulse to the "Wagner movement." Nor did it take Wagner long to divine his luck.

"On the day when I discovered that I would have to fly from Germany altogether," he writes, "I saw Liszt conduct a rehearsal

of my *Tannhäuser*, and was astonished to recognize my second self in this achievement. What I felt in composing this music he felt in performing it; what I intended to say in writing it down he said in making it sound. Wonderful! Through the love of this rarest of friends I found, at the moment when I lost *my home*, a *real home for my art*, which I had so long sought in vain and always at the wrong place. When I was sent away to wander about the world, he, who had so long been a wanderer, retired to a small town to create a home for me."

The historic friendship between Liszt and Wagner is the more remarkable in view of the fact that at first there had seemed to be a slight antipathy rather than sympathy between them. They had met casually for the first time during Wagner's first visit to Paris — he being a poor, neglected composer, Liszt a popular performer, who astonished all society with his brilliant feats of virtuosity, fantasias on operatic melodies, and the like. This prejudiced Wagner against him, and on his return to Germany he took no special pains to conceal his feelings. Liszt, the most cordial and genial of artists, was distressed on discovering that his slight acquaintance with Wagner had left a dissonant impression; and even before he knew any of Wagner's music, he made various efforts to meet him and reveal to him his real character, artistic and personal. He heard *Rienzi*, and Wagner discovered that he was going about everywhere, praising its beauties.[1] Then came the final test — the performance of *Tannhäuser* at Weimar; and now Wagner knew that his feelings had deceived him. Yet this was only the beginning of Liszt's services.

[1] This is Wagner's own account of his first acquaintance with Liszt. IV. 410-415.

WANTED BY THE POLICE

While Wagner was enjoying the rehearsal of *Tannhäuser* by Liszt, news was brought to him that he had better continue his flight immediately beyond the German boundary, as the Saxon police were on his track. There was no time to be lost. His portrait was to be placed in the gallery of "politically dangerous individuals" (poor Richard!), and the following warrant was issued by the Dresden police: —

"The royal Kapellmeister, Richard Wagner, of this city, described below, is to be placed under trial for active participation in the riots which have taken place here, but has not been found so far.

"All police districts are accordingly notified, and requested to arrest Wagner on sight and notify us immediately.

"DRESDEN, May 16, 1849.

"THE CITY POLICE DEPUTATION
v. OPPEL.

"Wagner is thirty-seven to thirty-eight years of age, of medium stature, has brown hair, an open forehead; eyebrows, brown; eyes, grayish blue; nose and mouth, proportioned; chin, round, and wears spectacles (*sic!*). Special characteristics: rapid in movements and speech. Dress: coat of dark green buckskin, trousers of black cloth, velvet vest, silk neckerchief, ordinary felt hat and boots."[1]

It may seem strange that the police did not succeed in capturing a "politically dangerous person" whose "round chin wore spectacles." The secret is revealed by the contents of a letter addressed by Wagner to Herr O. L. B. Wolff, which forms No. 17 in the Liszt Correspon-

[1] Translated from the original in Kastner's *Wagner Katalog*, Appendix B, 8.

dence, and is dated Zürich, May 29, 1849. From this we gather that Wagner travelled on the pass of a Dr. Widmann, whom he must have resembled in personal appearance — a resemblance which he doubtless increased by discontinuing to wear his spectacles on his chin. In the letter to Eduard Roeckel quoted on a preceding page, Wagner tells us how he came to Weimar and left it again: "When all was lost, I fled first to Weimar, where, after a few days, I was informed that a warrant of apprehension was to be put in motion after me. I consulted Liszt about my next movements. He took me to a house to make inquiries on my behalf. . . . On Liszt returning, he told me that not a moment was to be lost, the warrant of apprehension had been received, and I must leave Weimar at once." He made straight for Zürich and arrived there after four days' travel, his pass being demanded only once, at Lindau. At Zürich he remained a few days to rest and to secure a passport for France. He begs Herr Wolff to give the kindest greetings and warmest thanks to Liszt and the others who had assisted him in his flight, including Herr Wolff himself, who had supplied some of the shekels for the trip. Also, to tell Liszt that the trip had given him renewed pleasure in life and in his artistic projects: "I know that my latest experiences have taken me into a path on which I must produce the most important and valuable work of which I am capable." Especially interesting also are these lines about *Lohengrin*: —

"Liszt will ere long receive a bundle of scores, etc., from my wife; let him open it! The score of *Lohengrin* I beg him to examine leisurely; it is my latest, ripest work; no artist has seen it yet, and of none have I therefore been able to ascertain what

impression it may produce. Now I am anxious to hear what Liszt has to say about it. When he is through with it, I beg him to send it to Paris as soon as possible with the other scores and text-books."

IN PARIS AGAIN

The last line leads to the inference that Wagner intended to get some of his operas — perhaps even *Lohengrin* — performed in Paris. Vain hope — as we can see now: *Tannhäuser* was not performed there till twelve years later, and *Lohengrin* had to wait at the door of the Grand Opéra *forty-two* years! The time of his arrival was not a favorable one, any way, for serious operatic projects. Nor was his heart in the business: his former experiences in that city had left a bitter taste in his mouth, and it was only at Liszt's advice that he had gone there. Now, by a curious coincidence, it had happened that Liszt — who at that time could have had, of course, no idea that Wagner was to go to Paris — again had sent to the *Journal des Débats* an enthusiastic article on *Tannhäuser*, which had appeared shortly before Wagner's arrival. Suspicion was at once aroused that he had had his own finger in the pie, and Meyerbeer, especially, was disposed to take as dark a view as possible of the situation. His conduct on this occasion appears, indeed, to have greatly exasperated Wagner, who writes to Liszt (No. 18) that he cannot understand how there can be any friendship between him and Meyerbeer — Liszt all magnanimity, Meyerbeer all cunning and shrewd calculation of personal advantage: "Meyerbeer is petty, through and through, and I regret to say I cannot meet any one who feels the least inclination to deny this."

Liszt, knowing that Wagner was not a good hand at

intrigues, and out of place in an ante-chamber, had placed at his disposal his own agent, Belloni, a shrewd and clever man of the world. Belloni frankly told him that to win success in Paris he must have a great deal of money, like Meyerbeer, or else make himself feared.

"Very well, money I have none," Wagner accordingly writes to Liszt, "but an immense desire to create an artistic *terrorismus*. Give me your blessing, or, better still, your assistance! Come hither and lead the great hunt; let us shoot till the rabbits lie right and left." To Uhlig (No. 5) he writes in a similar vein: "My business is to create a revolution wherever I go. If I succumb, my defeat will be more honorable to me than success in the opposite way; even without a personal triumph I shall certainly benefit the cause."

It soon became clear that there was no chance to produce one of his operas, and as he felt a great aversion to setting to music a "Scribe or Dumas libretto," there was nothing left but to elaborate a new operatic plan of his own and get some French poet to put it into verse, in pursuance of Liszt's advice. He had, besides *Siegfried*, no fewer than two comic and three tragic subjects in his mind (Uhlig, No. 1). One of these was *Jesus of Nazareth:* —

"This subject I intend to offer to the French poet, whereby I hope to get rid of the whole affair, for it will be fun to see the dismay which this drama will create in my *associé;* if he has the courage to undergo with me all the thousand fights which will necessarily follow the attempt to put such a subject on the stage, I shall regard it as a matter of fate to go ahead; but if he forsakes me, so much the better: I shall be freed from the temptation of working in this hateful, jabbering language."

He succeeded in finding a French author who was willing to collaborate with him, but none of his subjects

seemed quite suited for the French stage; and as it would in any case have taken him about a year and a half to arrange the poetic outlines and compose the music, he determined to turn his back on the hated Paris, — *dieses gräuliche* Paris, — which weighed on him like a nightmare, and go back to Zürich.

MINNA WAGNER JOINS HER HUSBAND

All this time Wagner's wife had been left in Dresden, whence she reported to him "a thousand disagreeable things" that made him appear a much more active party in the revolution than he really had been. On his return to Zürich his first thought was to get her to join him in exile; nor was she unwilling: —

> "To-day I have received a letter from my wife, as touching as anything in the world could be. She is willing to come to me, and remain to share anew all the privations that are before us. A return to Germany, as you know, I cannot for some time think of; hence we must be reunited in a foreign country."

But poor Minna had no money to travel: she even needed sixty-two thalers to help out her parents, who had been hitherto supported by Wagner. What was there to do but to ask the generous Liszt to furnish the means? It was hard to do so, especially as, in the preceding letter, Wagner had been obliged to confess that, artist-like, he had used up part of the money that Liszt had given him to take along on his flight, by assisting some poor Saxon fugitives he had met in Paris! Liszt was far too generous and reckless himself to take offence at this, and opened his purse again. But there was some delay in Minna's coming, and Wagner feared she might have

changed her mind. So he writes to Fischer (No. 7, Aug. 10):—

"I am waiting from day to day, and fear that something may have happened to her. Dear Fischer, would you be so very kind as to see if my wife is still in Dresden, and let me know at once in case she should be ill? If you find her still there, tell her that I have not written lately because I expected daily to hear of her arrival; otherwise I would have told her that my outlook is improving, that I have good news from Weimar, while here the near future is provided for, so that she need have no anxiety; 300 florins have been advanced to me by a friend who took the *Lohengrin* score in pawn for it; besides, I have been asked by several admirers to read my latest opera-poems in the autumn, before a private audience and for a good price; also, to give a concert of my own compositions. . . . In short, let her take courage and come at once."

To judge by the letters of these few months of separation, Wagner was much attached to his wife. There are a dozen passages in which he writes as if he could not work before he had a cosy home again and his wife to preside over it. His appeals to Liszt are touching:—

"As soon as I have my wife I shall go to work again joyfully. Restore me to my art! You see that I am attached to no home, but I cling to this poor, good, faithful woman, for whom I have provided little but grief, who is serious, solicitous, and without expectation, and who nevertheless feels eternally chained to this unruly devil that I am. Restore her to me! Thus will you do me all the good that you could ever wish me; and see, for *this* I shall be *grateful* to you! yes, grateful! . . . See that she is made happy and can soon return to me! alas! which, in our sweet nineteenth-century language, means, send her as much money as you possibly can! Yes, that is the kind of a man I am! I can beg, I could steal, to make my wife happy, if only for a short time. You dear, good Liszt! do see what you can do! Help me! help me, dear Liszt!"

Minna came at last, and Wagner's happiness overflowed into a letter to Heine (No. 11): —

"My wife has happily arrived; I went as far as Rorschach on Lake Constanz to meet her. The bird and the dog are also here, and a small home we are now engaged in furnishing; the delicious Swiss air, the grand, inspiring Alpine views, some excellent friends I have made here, a feeling of freedom, unimpeded activity, energy, and the mood to work, — all this combined makes me, and my dear wife, too, cheerful, and I think that this good humor will bring forth some valuable fruits."

The one thing that troubles him is that opera which he is to compose for Paris. He writes as if he would almost sooner emigrate to America than work with French tools. Unfortunately, his wife, as well as Liszt, is a Philistine in this matter. Both want him to do what he cannot do — make concessions, write a French opera to a French text, when he feels that he cannot possibly do anything but write a German opera on a German subject. Liszt urges him to be diplomatic; to leave politics, personalities, and revolutionary ideas alone; to pay court to Roger and Madame Viardot, to critics and managers, for the sake of his musical outlook; while Minna is a Philistine for domestic reasons. She cannot understand why her husband, whom she knows to be a clever fellow, should not provide pot-boilers by writing for the art-market what the market-people happened to want at the moment. Here he was actually burning with the desire to waste his time in writing his *Siegfried's Death*, when, by his own confession, he had no hope that a manager could be found during his lifetime who would produce it, or artists who could sing and act it!

Had it not been for his wife — and his Dresden credi-

tors — Wagner would have given up the Paris opera business at once. That Minna, with all her beauty and domestic qualities, was not the right sort of a wife for a genius and a reformer, is most convincingly shown in this passage from a letter to Uhlig (No. 2): —

"She is really somewhat hectoring in this matter, and I shall no doubt have a hard tussle with her practical sense if I tell her bluntly that I do not *wish* to write an opera for Paris. True, she would shake her head and accept that decision too, were it not so closely related to our means of subsistence; there lies the critical knot, which it will be painful to cut. Already my wife is ashamed of our presence in Zürich, and thinks we ought to make everybody believe that we are in Paris,"

because the news had got abroad that he was writing an opera for that city. She was also distressed by his readiness to borrow money, and even to accept gifts of money. He tried to convince her that, "whoever helps me, only helps my art through me, and the sacred cause for which I am fighting." Womanlike,[1] Minna could see only the personal side of the question; the point of view indicated in the last quotation escaped her comprehension. To her it seemed vastly more important that he should preserve his social "respectability" by writing pot-boilers, and not accepting money-presents, than that he should create unremunerative works of genius for the edification of future generations. In a word, she was a Philistine.

[1] Critic-like, perhaps I should have said; for to judge by the tone of the reviews of the Wagner-Lizst letters a few years ago, most of the critics had got just about as far as Minna in their appreciation of Wagner's character.

WIELAND THE SMITH

Once more Wagner yielded to the urgency of the occasion, however hard it went against the grain of his conscience. On his return to Zürich he had been "as happy as a dog who has just got through with his whipping," in the belief that he was free at last to work and act in accordance with his exalted ideals: and now his best friends were nagging him once more to go to Paris, to seek to prostitute his muse. Read his own vivid description of the result (Letters to Heine, No. 14): —

"I saw that my wife, too, had nothing but the Paris bee in her bonnet, so I resolved, ill, very ill as I was, to go to Paris, in the devil's name, and, as you can fancy, in the most delightful mood. This visit to Paris [Feb., 1850] forms of all my experiences one of the most detestable. Everything that I knew before, and expected, happened literally. My sketch for an operatic poem quite justly seemed ludicrous to all who were familiar with French and the Paris Opéra; the condition of this Opéra, the *Prophet*, No. 5, and all the impressions therewith connected, made me look on myself as a madman: finally, not even to succeed in getting one of my overtures performed, — all my enormous loathing of the *Banquier-Musik*, from which every respectable person in Paris itself turns away, — all this, combined with my nervous prostration, put me into a condition which did not tempt me, as you can imagine, to write apologetic explanations to my friends who expected to get triumphant reports of success from me. On the contrary, I had got to such a point that I felt a more and more urgent desire to give up heaven and earth. It seemed as if there had been a conspiracy of all who were near me to nag me on to the utmost limit — and the utmost limit I had indeed reached, for anything seemed to me preferable to a continuance of life with people who considered the very thing that is the most repulsive to me as the most beneficial, and who agree that theoretically one should be an honest man, but in practice an unprincipled fellow."

The subject which Wagner had finally chosen for his Paris plan, and which was voted "ridiculous" there, is *Wieland the Smith*. Even in this project he was thus guided by his sympathy with mythical subjects. It is, moreover, amusingly characteristic of the reformer that even here, where he was to make "concessions," he writes to Uhlig (No. 5) about his plan for *Wieland:* "first of all I attack the five-act opera form, then the statute according to which in every grand opera there must be a ballet"; and in the same letter he suggests the necessity of starting a special musical journal which is to attack one tower after another, "the bombarding to continue as long as the ammunition lasts!"

Wieland was actually put into the form of a libretto in prose, which only needed versifying to make it ready for the composer; and as such it is printed in Vol. III. of the *Gesammelte Shriften*. Though it contains some striking operatic situations and is an interesting story in itself, it is not equal to his other dramas; his heart was not in it (Uhlig, No. 10): —

"Just as I am fresh and eager for all undertakings into which I can throw my whole soul, so was I sad and slow when Paris was the subject. Nothing would succeed with me. With endless trouble I forced myself to my *Wieland;* it always sounded to me like '*comment vous portez-vous?*' — the ink wouldn't flow, the pen scratched: without was dull, bad weather."

He never came back to this dramatic sketch, but on his return from Paris he offered it to Liszt, giving as reason why he himself did not want it, that it had been written in a painful mood, which he was loath to recall by setting it to music. He even offered to do the versifying for him, but Liszt had no wish to compose an opera; and

two years later the thought occurred to Wagner that it might be offered to Berlioz, whose ill-success he attributed largely to his want of skill in preparing his own texts. This offer, however, was never made, so far as the epistolary record shows.[1]

[1] Further details of the *Wielard* episode in Paris may be found in No. 10 of the letters to Uhlig.

LOHENGRIN AT WEIMAR

DOUBT AND DARING

It was on the twenty-eighth of August, 1847, that Wagner had put the last touches to the *Lohengrin* Prelude, thereby completing the whole opera.[1] On Sept. 22 of the following year the finale of the first act was given at a concert in celebration of the three-hundredth anniversary of the formation of the Dresden orchestra: this was the only thing in his opera that Wagner had been able to get a hearing of before his flight from Dresden. On Aug. 9, 1849, he wrote to Uhlig from Zürich: —

"Yesterday, at last, I received my scores! I played over a few things in *Lohengrin* at the piano, and I cannot tell you what a wonderfully deep impression this, my own work, made on me."

On April 21, 1850, he wrote to Liszt: —

"My dear friend, I have just read a little in the score of *Lohengrin;* it is not my custom to read my own works. It aroused a burning desire in me to have this opera performed. I beg you herewith to take my wish to heart. Bring out my *Lohengrin! You are the only one* to whom I would put this request; to no one but you would I entrust the creation of this opera; but to you I surrender it with the fullest, most joyous confidence. . . . In Dresden there is a correct score; Herr von Lüttichau bought it of

[1] It is a general rule among composers, as among authors, to write their "prefaces" last.

me for the copying price of thirty-six thalers ; as he does not wish to produce it (which, in fact, I would not permit under the present musical directorship), you may succeed in getting that copy for thirty-six thalers, or at any rate have another one made from it," etc.

This is the letter to which reference is made in the oft-quoted passage from the *Mittheilung* (IV. 414):—

"At the close of my last Paris sojourn, when I was ill, unhappy, and in despair, my eye fell on the score of my *Lohengrin*, which I had almost forgotten. A pitiful feeling overcame me that these tones would never resound from the deathly-pale paper ; two words I wrote to Liszt, the answer to which was nothing else than the information that, as far as the resources of the Weimar Opera permitted, the most elaborate preparations were being made for the production of *Lohengrin*."

Liszt had arranged his programme with the wisdom of a man of the world. In the week of Goethe's birthday (Aug. 28,) there was to be a great concourse of people at Weimar to celebrate the unveiling of the Herder monument.[1] As this was out of the regular opera season, Liszt decided to make a special *event* of the *Lohengrin première*, as its importance deserved, the singers being recalled from their vacation for the rehearsals and two public performances, whereupon the house was to be closed again till the opening of the regular season.

"Your *Lohengrin*" (he wrote, *Wagner-Liszt Correspondence*, No. 34) "will be given under conditions that are most unusual and most favorable for its success. The direction will spend on this occasion almost 2000 thalers [$1500], — a sum unprecedented

[1] By a happy coincidence, of which neither Liszt nor Wagner seem to have been aware, Aug. 28 was also the third birthday of the completed *Lohengrin*.

at Weimar within memory of man.[1] The press shall not be forgotten, and dignified, serious articles will appear in succession in different papers. The artists will be all fire and flame. The number of violins will be somewhat increased (from sixteen to eighteen); the bass clarinet has been bought; no essential detail will be omitted from the musical web and its sketch. I shall personally undertake all the piano, choral, and orchestral rehearsals, while Genast will zealousy follow your indications regarding the staging. It is a matter of course that we shall not omit a note nor a comma of your work, but that we will give it, as far as in our power lies, in all its immaculate beauty."

To make quite sure of following out his friend's intention, Liszt begs him for some metronomic marks and other directions, supplementary to those contained in the text and the full score. Wagner complies willingly and eagerly in a long series of letters, — Nos. 31 to 53, — which accordingly form an invaluable Guide to the performance of *Lohengrin* — a Guide which perhaps throws more light on his principles of composition and on his new style of dramatic vocalism than his elaborate theoretical treatises, in which concrete cases are only introduced by way of illustration, while here everything is so direct that the reader may imagine himself a student

[1] To-day we know that ten times that sum does not suffice to put *Lohengrin* on the stage according to Wagner's sumptuous intentions. A good part of this "unprecedented sum" of $1500 came from the private purse of the Grand Duchess, and among the extra expenses were the hiring of bass-clarinet and harp players, which the operatic orchestra did not include, and extra trombones. Richard Pohl relates that the tenor, Herr Beck, was entirely unable to do justice to the title rôle, and as he soon thereafter retired from the stage, it was whispered that Wagner's music had ruined his voice! Pohl also relates that among the violins in the orchestra there was no less a virtuoso than Joseph Joachim, then only nineteen years old. Liszt was the first who discovered his value, and he brought him from the Gewandhaus orchestra in Leipzig to be his Concertmeister in Weimar.

standing on the stage and receiving from Wagner a *viva voce* lesson in the principles and practice of the modern music-drama.[1]

In Liszt's replies to Wagner, there is nothing so remarkable as his growing admiration of the score, mixed with serious apprehensions as to whether *Lohengrin* could be really made a success! Before there was any question as to its performance at Weimar, Liszt had written (No. 24): —

"I found it difficult to separate myself from your *Lohengrin* score. The more deeply I entered into its plan and the masterly execution of it, the higher rose my enthusiasm for this extraordinary work. You will, however, pardon my petty timidity if I still entertain some doubts regarding the completely satisfactory results of a performance of it."

A few weeks before this he had written: —

"The wonderful score of *Lohengrin* has made a deep impression on me; for a performance, however, I would feel some apprehensions on account of the highly ideal coloring which you have retained throughout. You will consider me a sordid business man, but my true friendship for you justifies me in saying . . ."[2]

[1] Vocal teachers, in and out of conservatories, cannot be too seriously urged to place these letters in the hands of their pupils. They will correct many prevalent notions regarding Wagner's vocal style, and will do much to help their pupils to success in the modern style of dramatic vocalism, which at present has the highest market value. It must be borne in mind, however, that while what Wagner says (in No. 41) regarding German and Italian vocalists was true in 1850, since then a new school of dramatic vocalism has been formed, which in the higher aspects of the art (emotional accent, and expression) makes the great German singers of to-day safer guides and models than those of the Italian school. See the chapter on Wagner's vocal style in this volume.

[2] The sentence is not completed, either because the manuscript was torn or because Wagner's widow (Liszt's daughter) in editing these letters saw fit to suppress what followed.

Wagner's reply (No. 26) is so characteristic that I must italicize part of it: —

"Your doubts regarding the satisfactory effect of a performance of this opera have often risen in me too: I believe, however, that *if the performance itself harmonizes with my coloring*, the business (even the close) will come out all right! What we need here is to *dare!*"

He himself was never afraid to "dare" anything. Although he was aware that not a few of his fellow-revolutionists were now shut up in the Saxon prisons, he was eager to risk a trip in disguise to Weimar to attend the first performance of *Lohengrin;* and he would no doubt have gone, if Liszt had given him the slightest encouragement. He admits that it would be a desperate move, especially as he was no longer indifferent, as some time before, to being locked up in prison; but perhaps the Grand Duchess or the Duke of Coburg could help him in this plan. He promised to be very careful to preserve his incognito. "See what you can do! At any rate I, poor devil, would once more look forward to a pleasant experience — perhaps also receive a new stimulus and much needed encouragement to work."

But Liszt was too practical to be softened by his friend's pleading, and he replied, in italics, that the projected incognito visit was an *absolute impossibility.* He writes, however, that he and the artists are floating in the *ether* of *Lohengrin* and confident of being able to give a correct performance: "Adieu, dear friend; I find your work sublime."

While the rehearsals are going on, let us cast a glance at this opera of which Liszt was the first to discover the sublimity.

THE STORY OF LOHENGRIN

Act I. The rising curtain reveals a meadow near Antwerp, on which King Heinrich der Vogler (tenth century) has assembled the nobles of Brabant to prepare for defence against the Hungarian invaders, and also, according to the custom of the period, to sit in judgment over their own disputes. Count Telramund, who has the reputation of a most valiant soldier and nobleman, being called upon for an explanation of the troubles which have come to the King's ears, steps forward to relate that the Duke of Brabant, on his deathbed, entrusted to his care his two children, Elsa and Gottfried. He guarded them like the apple of his eye; but one day Elsa took a walk in the forest with her brother and returned without him. No trace of him could ever be found, and from Elsa's strange conduct no doubt could remain that she had murdered him in order to become herself mistress of Brabant, and share the rule with a secret lover, whom she was suspected of favoring. He had therefore voluntarily renounced the right to her hand, which her father had given him, and had married Ortrud, a descendant of the former rulers of the country, the Dukes of Friesland. He being the nearest relative of the Duke of Brabant, Telramund accordingly claims the rule over his country for himself, and demands that Elsa be punished for fratricide.

The King is loath to believe in such a horrible crime, but his duty is to summon Elsa and hear her answer to the charge, and then proceed to his judgment. Elsa appears in simple white attire, accompanied by her

female retinue in similar dress. To the King's question whether she confessed her guilt, she replies with the words, "My poor brother"; and after a pause she relates, as one in a trance, how, one day, as she was pouring out her grief in prayer, she fell into a sweet sleep, and in her dreams she saw a knight in silver armor and with a golden horn at his side who came to her and spoke words of consolation. The King is touched by her innocent appearance and demeanor, but Telramund declares that her "dream" only proves his insinuations regarding her secret lover. He is ready to submit the matter to a trial by combat, and the King asks Elsa who is to be her champion. "The Knight of my vision," is her answer; "he shall wear my father's crown, and call me wife too, so he will." Four trumpeters now blow their signal to the four quarters of the compass, and the Herald, in loud voice, summons whatever Knight will do battle in Elsa's cause. Painful silence — no answer. Elsa begs the King to repeat the summons, and once more the trumpeters and the Herald are heard. Silence again. Elsa falls on her knees, in fervent prayer, when suddenly there is a great commotion among the soldiers and attendants in the background. A boat, drawn by a swan, is seen coming down the river, and on it stands a Knight in silver uniform and helmet, with a golden horn at his side. After the joyous acclamations with which his arrival is greeted by the chorus have subsided, Lohengrin steps off his boat and in tones that are surrounded by a halo of harmonies, dismisses the swan, and proclaims that he has come to defend the innocent maid. Then turning to Elsa, who has thrown herself at his feet, he asks if she will place her cause in his hands and accept

him as her spouse if he wins. Elsa promises to be his, body and soul; but there is one more thing which he makes her promise: she must NEVER ask him who he is or whence he came. "Never," she replies, "shall this question cross my lips." The combat follows, in which Telramund is floored; but Lohengrin generously spares his life, and the act comes to a close in a grand finale in which the rage and disappointment of Telramund and Ortrud are mingled with and overpowered by the joyous exclamations of the King and his retinue, and the love duo of Elsa and Lohengrin.

Act II. Telramund and Ortrud, disgraced by the issue of the combat which established Elsa's innocence in the eyes of the law, are seen sitting in the gloom of night on the steps of the palace at Antwerp, which is brilliantly illuminated inside. The sounds of festive music proceeding from within help to deepen the gloom of the figures without. Telramund reproaches Ortrud bitterly for what she has done; for he now sees clearly that she lied to him when she told him that she had with her own eyes seen Elsa drown her brother. It was with this falsehood, combined with her prophecy that the old Frisian dynasty, of which she was the last representative, was about to return to power, that she had led him to give up Elsa and marry her, with the consequence of losing his all. Even the sword has been taken from the dishonored, else it would have fared ill with his wife. But Ortrud attempts to pacify him by disclosing her plan of revenge. She has inherited the gift of sorcery from her heathen ancestors, and Lohengrin's secret is therefore no secret for her. She knows and tells Telramund that if Elsa can be induced to ask her lover the forbidden ques-

tion,— who he is and whence he came,— he will have to leave her immediately and return to his home. She also tells him that if but the smallest limb — if only a joint of his fingers — be taken from Lohengrin, he will become powerless as any mortal. This, then, is to be their campaign: she herself will infuse the poison of doubt and curiosity in Elsa's heart, while Telramund is to attempt to convince the King that Lohengrin is a sorcerer, who has won his battle through witchcraft; or, failing that, to make an attempt on his life.

Elsa appears in the balcony to the left, and on hearing her voice Ortrud urges Telramund to go away and leave her to carry out her plan. Elsa, too happy to bear a grudge against any one, comes down to admit Ortrud, who thus gets the coveted opportunity to poison the trusting girl's mind with fatal suspicions. The day breaks, and the place before the palace gradually fills up with nobles and their followers, all in the gayest mood. A Herald announces that the King has proclaimed Telramund an outlaw, and that Lohengrin is to be ruler of Brabant and to lead the forces to battle against the Hungarians. The bridal procession of Elsa now marches across the stage. Among the women is Ortrud, richly dressed; and just as the procession reaches the cathedral steps, she rushes forward and claims precedence over Elsa, whose bridegroom she pronounces a sorcerer who vanquished her husband by evil arts — the reason why he forbade all questions as to his name and home. The opportune arrival of the King, followed by Lohengrin and the nobles, puts an end to this painful scene; but hardly has the procession begun to move again, when there is a second interruption. Telramund has suddenly mounted the steps

and turns to hurl against Lohengrin the same accusations as those just heard from Ortrud's lips. He does not succeed, however, in shaking the confidence of the wedding guests, who, on the contrary, crowd around Lohengrin to pledge their trust by a hand-shake. This gives Telramund an opportunity to get near Elsa and to whisper into her ear that she is in danger of losing Lohengrin; but if she will only give him an opportunity to cut off one of his finger tips, he will never be able to leave her. This evidently makes an impression on Elsa, but when Lohengrin comes to her side a moment later, she sinks confidingly in his arms, and the procession enters the cathedral, to the solemn sounds of the organ.

Act III. When the curtain rises again, after a brilliant orchestral introduction which depicts the bustle and joy of the wedding day, we see the bridal chamber, into which Elsa with her companions enters on one side, while Lohengrin, with the King and nobles, enters on the other, to the strains of the wedding march and chorus. The King embraces Lohengrin and Elsa and then departs with the guests. The lovers are left to their caresses, but not long does their bliss last. Elsa is more and more overcome by the curiosity to know the name and origin of her husband. It is not ordinary feminine curiosity that prompts her; nor is it the rankling of Ortrud's accusation that Lohengrin had won the battle and her through witchcraft; it is the suspicion instilled in her mind by Telramund that she is in danger of losing Lohengrin unless she resorts to magic means to retain him. At first she uses the subtle arts of her sex: "It is so sweet to hear you say *Elsa;* shall I not also have the pleasure of hearing the sound of *your* name?" Lohen-

grin tries to calm her — he did not doubt her innocence — why should she doubt him? But Elsa becomes more and more excited: the sudden change from a maiden accused of fratricide to that of a happy wife wedded to the lover of her dream, has unstrung her nerves, and the terrible thought of losing Lohengrin finally assumes in her mind the form of a sense-illusion — she fancies she hears the swan approaching to take her lover back to that region of eternal bliss whence he had just told her he had come. Losing all control of herself, she breaks her promise and asks the fatal question. Hardly have the words escaped her lips when she sees Telramund and four nobles with drawn swords enter by the door to which Lohengrin's back is turned. Uttering a terrible shriek, she seizes his sword, hands it to him, and Telramund falls pierced to the heart. Lohengrin commands his accomplices to carry the body before the King. Elsa has recovered from her morbid excitement and is now all tears and contrition. But it is too late. The mischief has been done, and her lover must leave her forever. He rings the bell, and places Elsa in the hands of her attendants, bidding them bring her before the King, where he will reveal his name and rank.

The scene changes back to the meadow by the river Scheldt. The sun is about to rise, and the nobles and warriors assemble to prepare for their campaign and to hear the King's admonitions. A bier with the covered body of Telramund is brought on the stage, and shortly afterwards Elsa and Lohengrin arrive separately. The men acclaim Lohengrin with delight as their head; but to their dismay he replies that he cannot be their leader. Not only that, but he has come as a complainant. He

lifts the shroud from Telramund's body: "This man attempted my life at night — did I do right to slay him?" — "Heaven will punish him as you have done on earth," the King and the nobles reply. "But there is another one," Lohengrin continues, "as whose accuser I stand here — Elsa, my wife. She promised, before you all, not to ask my name and condition, but she has broken her promise, and I must therefore leave her and you at once; for hear who I am: In a distant land lies the burg Montserrat where is preserved the cup known as the Holy Grail. Its guardians and knights are endowed with supernatural power, and one of their missions is to champion the rights of the innocent in all countries; but they can retain their power only by preserving the secret of their origin. If that is discovered, they are obliged to return to Montserrat: —

> "Now know how I must punish broken faith!
> The Grail obeying here to you I came:
> My father Parzival as King is crownéd;
> His knight am I — and Lohengrin my name."

During his accusation of his wife and the narrative of the Grail, Lohengrin has preserved a terrible sternness; but now he turns to Elsa, and the demi-god's severity melts before the human grief at the thought that he must break his own heart and hers whom he so deeply loves, by leaving her forever. She implores him frantically to remain, and the King and all the nobles support her prayer; but he declares he has already tarried too long: should he remain, his disobedience to the Grail's laws would deprive him of all his knightly power. As he speaks, there is a great commotion in the background: "The swan! the swan!" the men and women exclaim,

and, "Horrible, ha, the swan! the swan!" Elsa repeats. Lohengrin sadly greets his bird and then once more turns to Elsa and tells her that could he have remained at her side but one year, her brother, whom she considered dead, but who had been changed into a swan, would have returned to them, released through the Grail's power from the sorcerer's enchantment. He kisses Elsa, who has clung to him desperately till her strength leaves her, and approaches the swan, when Ortrud suddenly rushes forward with an expression of wild joy and exclaims: "Farewell, proud hero; depart that I may tell this fool who it was that drew her knight's boat! I recognize the chain with which I changed the child into a swan. It was the heir of Brabant. 'Tis well that you drove away the knight, for had he remained a year he would have freed your brother. Thus do the ancient gods avenge themselves on their Christian enemy!" In her malicious joy Ortrud has revealed her secret about the magic chain. Lohengrin has heard it; after a brief prayer he loosens the chain from the swan, which immediately dives, while a dove flutters down and takes its place; and in the spot where the swan disappeared emerges in a moment Gottfried. But Elsa's joy at the recovery of her brother is but brief. Looking up from him, she sees Lohengrin disappearing on the boat. "My husband, my husband!" she wails, and with a cry she sinks lifeless into Gottfried's arms.

THE FIRST PERFORMANCE

It was on Aug. 28, 1850, that this beautiful and pathetic drama, which at the present day is the most popular work in the whole operatic repertory, first saw

the light of the stage; and a few days later Liszt wrote to Wagner: —

"Your *Lohengrin* is from beginning to end a sublime work. At very many places tears well to my eyes from the heart. As the whole opera is a single, indivisible wonder, it is impossible for me to specify this or that trait, this or that combination or effect. Following the example of the pious priest who underscored the whole *Imitation of Christ*, word for word, you might find me underscoring the whole of *Lohengrin*, note for note. The beginning I should feel inclined to make at the duet between Elsa and Lohengrin in the third act, which to me is the culmination of all that is true and beautiful in art.

"Our first performance was comparatively satisfactory. . . . The court, as well as some intelligent Weimar people, are full of sympathy and admiration for your work. And as far as the public is concerned, it will doubtless consider it an honor to applaud and pronounce that beautiful which it cannot understand."

It is easy to read between these lines that Liszt was not satisfied with either the performance of the opera or its reception by the public. That Wagner himself would have been still less pleased is a matter of course: if *Tannhäuser* at Dresden, with the scenic resources of a Court Theatre, and several of the greatest living dramatic singers, had left his mind stored with "tormenting memories," what would have been his experiences at the small Weimar theatre, where there were no great singers at all, and the stage resources far from adequate for an opera which calls for such sumptuous scenery and costumes and grand processions as this one does! The general impression which he received from various sources is reflected in this passage from a letter to Heine (No. 14): —

"The performance is said to have been quite good in all subordinate points; but in the principal point — the artists on the stage

— it is pronounced weak and altogether inadequate. Well, that was perhaps inevitable; I cannot expect the Lord to work private miracles in my behalf by letting singers of the kind I need grow on trees."

And to Liszt he writes (No. 41): —

"What pleases me most is to see that you have not lost courage, but intend — notwithstanding a certain atmosphere of disappointment about you — to devote all your energies to the task of keeping the opera afloat."

He was especially disturbed by the information that *Lohengrin* had lasted almost five hours: —

"I had gone through the whole opera, soon after its completion, to ascertain its duration, and had calculated that the first act should take up not much over an hour, the second 1¼ hours, the last again something over an hour, so that altogether, including intermissions, I reckoned it would last from 6 to 9.45 at the latest."

He comes to the conclusion that the chief trouble lies in the fact that the singers treat a portion of their rôles as ordinary recitatives which they can sing as slowly as they please; whereas in *Lohengrin* there are no such recitatives at all, but everything must be sung in time, modified only by the emotional changes and *nuances* called for by the words of the text. Accordingly he implores Liszt:[1] —

[1] The ten-page letter in which this passage occurs (No. 41) should be copied and committed to memory by every student of dramatic singing. It will be worth more to him than a hundred ordinary "music lessons." I may remark, in connection with this, that if students of music would give more time to the reading of good musical books, and a trifle less to technical exercises with vocal teachers, there would be fewer failures when singers come before the public. Brains are now called for in music as in other professions, and the days of singing marionettes are over.

"Be firm and decisive in compelling the vocalists to sing what they take for recitatives in a determined, brisk tempo. It is especially by this treatment of the recitatives that the duration of the opera can be reduced, as I know by experience, by almost an hour." [1]

Of course, as the Weimar singers had not miraculously "grown on trees," they could not be expected to master at once that new style of brisk dramatic utterance on which the life of Wagnerian song depends; so there was nothing left but to follow the usual expedient of conductors in face of incompetent singers — omitting parts of the score. Both Liszt and the stage-manager Genast wrote about the necessity of this procedure to the composer, who at first complained bitterly of this "capitulation" to lazy singers and easily fatigued opera-goers, threatened to "go into no more battles," to "give up the whole opera," to look on Weimar as on all other theatres, and to "write no more operas." He had to yield, finally, but would have nothing to do with the cuts, and begged his Weimar friends, if they *must* make them, to ask no advice of him, but leave him in ignorance as to how and where his opera was mutilated.

One omission, however, he counselled himself; namely, the second part of the Grail narrative in the last act, where Lohengrin relates how one day a mournful sound had been borne on the air to the Grail Temple telling of a maiden in distress; how a swan arrived with a boat and brought him, the chosen protector of the maiden, to the scene of the combat.

The Weimar tenor had found the first part of the nar-

[1] He might have said by more than an hour. Under Mr. Anton Seidl's bâton, a performance of *Lohengrin* lasts only three hours and twenty minutes, excluding intermissions.

rative so exhausting that he was unable to sing the second; and Wagner, judging that this would probably be the case with most tenors, cancelled this passage altogether.[1]

WAGNER'S OPINION OF LOHENGRIN

I have already remarked on Wagner's accurate self-judgment: he found each new opera, as it left his workshop, better than its predecessors; not from that paternal feeling which makes an author usually like his youngest child best, but from a deep conviction that it really was the best, because his creative imagination was maturing, and his artistic instinct and experience enabled him to attain a more finished style and a more organic form. Thus, as in 1846 he had written to Liszt, on sending him the scores of *Rienzi* and *Tannhäuser:* "I wish and hope that the latter may please you more than the former"; so, in 1853, he wrote to his friend: "I certainly share your preference for *Lohengrin:* it is the best thing I have done so far." In another letter (No. 32), in which he begs Liszt to give *Lohengrin* without cuts, he says: "I have in this opera taken pains to establish such a close, plastic relation between the music, the poem, and the action, that I believe I am quite sure of my cause in this instance." So little faith had he, however, in the singers and audiences of this period, that he frankly confessed to the Härtels, when he tried to make arrangements for printing the score, that he did not

[1] It is printed in the original full score, but not in the vocal score, nor in the text-books. The omitted lines are reprinted in Pohl's *Wagner Studien*, p. 74. The whole narrative was sung at the Munich performances in 1869.

believe that the opera would come much into vogue, at least during his lifetime,— which, by the way, was not a wise way to talk to hesitating publishers.

Works of genius often have a peculiar biographic coloring, derived from the circumstances under which they were composed. In his *Communication to My Friends* Wagner himself points out this biographic element in his operas, at considerable length. Of especial interest are his remarks on *Lohengrin* (Vol. IV. pp. 351–366), in which occurs this poetic passage, following some remarks on the sense of isolation which had overcome him when he found no sympathy for the honest and lofty artistic ideals which he had aimed at in his preceding two operas: —

"By the might of my ardent desire I had now climbed to the longed-for height of the pure, the chaste: I felt myself outside of the modern world, in a clarified, sacred, ethereal atmosphere, which, in the ecstasy of my sense of isolation, filled me with voluptuous thrills such as we experience on a lofty alpine summit, when, with our head in the blue ocean of air, we look down on the mountain ridges and valleys below. Such summits the thinker climbs in order to fancy himself 'purified' at this height of all that is 'earthly,' and thus placed at the extreme limit of human potentiality: here at last he can enjoy his own self, and amid this enjoyment, under the influence of the colder alpine atmosphere, at last congeal to a monumental ice-figure, which, as philosopher and critic, with frosty self-contentment, contemplates the warm world of living things below. — The longing which had driven *me* to that height was artistic, sensuously human: what I wished to escape was not the warmth of *life*, but the miasmatic, sultry atmosphere of the trivial sensuality of a certain *phase* of life — that of the actual present."

It is related of Dickens and other famous authors that the characters drawn by their fancy became after a time

so real to them that they laughed their laughs and wept their tears. It was just so with Wagner; he confesses (IV. 369) regarding Elsa and Lohengrin: "I suffered actual deep grief — which often found vent in scalding tears — when I realized the inevitable tragic necessity of the separation, the destruction, of the two lovers." Some of his friends, accustomed to operas with happy endings, prevailed upon him so far that at one time he seriously contemplated a change of the plot, permitting Lohengrin to remain with Elsa; further reflection, however, convinced him that such a change would mar his tragedy completely, and it was allowed to remain unaltered.[1]

Many further interesting utterances of Wagner on *Lohengrin* might be quoted, but the limits of space permit the insertion of only one more — the following admirable analysis (in a letter to Liszt, No. 72) of the character of Ortrud, which shows how deeply he entered into the spirit of his characters, and at the same time reveals his opinion of political women: —

"Ortrud is a woman who *does not know love*. This expresses everything, even the most terrible. Her sphere is politics. A political *man* is detestable, but a political woman is an atrocity: such an atrocity I had to portray. There is one kind of love in this woman, the love of the past, of generations that have perished, the terrible, insane pride of ancestry, which can only utter itself as hatred of all that actually exists at present. In a man such love becomes ridiculous, but in a woman it is terrible, because woman, with her strong natural need of love, *must* love something,

[1] Fortunately; for the scene of Lohengrin's farewell is one of the most pathetic in all literature, and I am sure that many of my readers, like myself, shed tears when they first read this scene. To this day I cannot read or hear it with dry eyes.

and her pride of ancestry, her adherence to the past, consequently becomes a murderous fanaticism. History shows us no characters more cruel than political women. It is therefore not jealousy of Elsa (in reference to Friedrich) that sways Ortrud, but her whole passion is revealed solely in that scene of the second act where, after Elsa's disappearance from the balcony, she starts up from the cathedral step and invokes her old long-forgotten gods.[1] She is reactionary, thinks only of the old, and is therefore hostile to all that is new, in the most ferocious sense of the word: she would like to exterminate the world and nature, merely to bring her decayed gods back to life. And this is not a mere stubborn, morbid whim of Ortrud's, but her infatuation takes hold of her with the full force of a feminine love-longing which has had no food, no growth, no object: and it is for this reason that she is terribly *grand*. Not a trace of pettiness must therefore appear in her personation: never must she seem simply malicious or offended; every utterance of her scorn, her treachery, must reveal the whole might of that terrible madness which can only be gratified by the destruction of others or of herself."

What critic, what commentator, has ever analyzed one of Wagner's characters as incisively as Ortrud's soul is here dissected and laid bare? And if it is true that the highest achievement of criticism is to give the reader impressions and emotions similar to those inspired by the art-work itself, where can you find a more perfect critic than Wagner showed himself when he wrote his poetic analysis of the *Lohengrin* prelude (V. 233), in which he puts into words what the orchestra tells in glowing tones and colors — how the ecstatic vision

[1] This answers (by anticipation) Dr. Hueffer's objection that "the introduction in a by-the-way manner of the two great religious principles [Christian and pagan] appears not particularly happy, and it cannot be denied that the character of Ortrud, although grand in its conception, has suffered through this unnecessary complication of motives." According to Wagner, it is the very key to Ortrud's character.

beholds the rarefied ether of the blue sky gradually condensing into the definite lines and forms of a group of angels who slowly sink down to the earth, bearing in their midst the Grail, in which the Saviour's blood had been received; and when at last the growing radiance of the music has reached its climax, and the holy vessel is uncovered and revealed to sight, the spectator's senses are dazed, and he sinks down unconsciously, in rapturous worship. Having diffused the heavenly blessing with the visible radiance of the Grail, the angels slowly ascend with it skywards and disappear again in the blue ether as the music dies away.

LISZT ON LOHENGRIN

Well might Wagner write to Liszt: "Your friendship is the most important and significant occurrence in my life"; for Liszt not only gave life to *Lohengrin*, and provided an asylum for his exiled friend's other operas when it seemed as if all other doors were being shut against them, but he worked with his pen as industriously as with his bâton to promote Wagner's affairs. He wrote a long analytical essay on *Lohengrin* which, coming from such a world-famed musician, could not but create a sensation and attract general attention to the opera which he praised so highly. It remains to this day the best essay ever written on *Lohengrin;* but we who read it to-day, and who find its enthusiastic praise the most natural thing in the world, should try to bear in mind what insight and what courage it took to write as Liszt did about *Lohengrin* and Wagner's other operas at a time when the whole musical world was disposed to look upon them as the ephemeral works of an eccentric

iconoclast and an enemy of all that is true and beautiful in music. Liszt boldly declared that Wagner was equally great as poet and musician and the greatest of all dramatic composers; that the text of *Lohengrin*, even apart from the music, had the originality of style, the beauty of versification, the clever arrangement of the dramatic intrigue, and the eloquent language of passion which raised it to the rank of a great literary tragedy. "Its literary merits suffice," he adds, "to place its author among the most genuinely endowed dramatists of the world." He also pointed out how mediæval local color is given to the verses by the use of an occasional old German word and turn of style, by following Wolfram von Eschenbach's example of not beginning a verse with a capital letter unless it opens a sentence, etc. "This opera must doubtless be regarded as an event in German music, as the expression of a new system in dramatic art." He explains the ingenious use of Leading Motives (for which no term had as yet been coined), and compares this new principle of musical form to *a new style of architecture*, which could not be altered without modifying its whole character — a most admirable and suggestive comparison, which the reader will appreciate more fully after perusing the chapter on Leading Motives in the present volume.

"This opera," he continues, "is a true blending of poetry and music," and a combination of all these effects suffices to make "the imaginative part of the audience leave the opera-house convinced of the actual existence of the holy Grail, its temple, its knights, and its endless beatitude." Lohengrin's declaration of love, "Elsa, ich liebe dich," "recalls by its eloquent brevity the

solemn simplicity of the ancient tragedians, and is one of the most thrilling moments in modern dramatic art." "Ortrud seems destined to be placed by the side of Lady Macbeth, and Margaret of Anjou, as Elsa by the side of Milton's Eve and the antique Psyche." The more closely we examine the score, the more we are astounded to see how minutely not only the vocal melodies and accents follow the poem, but how the orchestra also throbs in sympathy at every moment: —

"To it he entrusts the function of revealing to us the soul, the passions, the feelings, even the most transient emotions of his characters. His orchestra becomes the echo, the transparent veil, through which we note all their heart-beats. . . . In it we hear the angry cry of hatred, the raving of revenge, the whisperings of love, the ecstasy of adoration."

Liszt also points out some of the technical means with which Wagner produces such novel and delightful orchestral effects, such as the division of the violins into several groups playing different harmonic parts but all of the same tone-color; and the use of three flutes, three oboes, three clarinets (including a bass-clarinet), three bassoons, three trombones, and a tuba,

"which triple-system has this advantage, among others, that the whole chord can be given with the same tone-color, which throws on his instrumentation bright lights and shades that he distributes with exquisite art, and now mixes, now brings into harmony, with the vocal declamation in a manner which is as novel as it is expressive."

Liszt's essay is brimful of such *aperçus*, but we can quote only one more: —

"Wagner's heart is devoured by the noble and secret wound of art-fanaticism. . . . He felt a proud contempt for traditional

usage. . . . He has solemnly renounced all consideration for the customary claims of the *prima donna assoluta* and the *basso cantante*. In his eyes there are no singers, but only rôles. Consequently he finds it quite natural to let the leading singer remain silent during a whole act, and simply act, if her presence adds to the realism and probability of the action — a method of procedure scorned by every Italian *diva* and inexecutable by her."

This essay Liszt wrote in French, in which language he felt more at ease than in German,[1] and on Sept. 25, 1850, he addressed a letter to Wagner telling him that in a week he would send him a manuscript which he intended to print in a Paris journal in October; adding that he was anxious to have it appear also in a German version, either in a newspaper or as a pamphlet, and that he would be delighted if Wagner himself would undertake the task of translating it, with variations and corrections, in order that he himself might thus feel free from all responsibility in regard to translator's errors, etc.

Wagner's reply is couched in terms of profuse gratitude for his friend's generous sacrifice of his own time and work in order to aid him. Six weeks, however, elapsed before Liszt received a copy of the translation, and the reasons for this delay are given at length in the fifty-second letter: —

"I was so deeply moved by your essay, that I became immediately convinced of *one* thing; namely, that I could not be a collaborator in a thing which encouraged, inspired, and moved me so profoundly. It made me feel indelicate and embarrassed to think of writing down with my own hand the praise which you dictated in your incomparably brilliant paper. I hesitated, delayed, and

[1] Some of his letters to Wagner were also written in French, and are printed in that language as an appendix to the German edition.

knew not what to do. Finally my friend Ritter came to my aid and offered to make the translation: I agreed, reserving the privilege of revising it, less with an eye to your eulogies than to the preservation of your admirable style."

He goes on to add that all the critical remarks on the work and its author were translated as literally as possible, and with the greatest effort to preserve "the eloquent, novel, and highly poetic language of the original," while in the explanatory portions and the quotations from the text the translation was made more freely and with additions. Then he adds the following significant lines, doubly underscored: —

"Were I to tell you what my feelings were on carefully perusing and reperusing this essay, I could hardly find terms to express myself. Let this suffice: I feel more than fully rewarded for my trials, my sacrifices, and artistic struggles, on noting the impression I have made on you in particular. To be thus completely understood was my only ambition; and to have been understood is the most ravishing gratification of my longing."

ROBERT FRANZ ON LOHENGRIN

Liszt was not the only man of genius who recognized *Lohengrin* as a masterwork, a decade or two before the critics. Among the eminent musicians who were invited by Liszt, or came of their own accord to hear Wagner's operas at Weimar, was one of the great trio of German song-composers, Robert Franz, who was then only in his thirty-seventh year, but who was destined to bring the German *Lied* to its highest perfection along the lines marked out by Schubert and Schumann. Franz heard *Lohengrin* as interpreted by Liszt, and was moved thereby to write a private letter which was subsequently printed

in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (1852). It is too long to be translated entire, but the following extracts will give an idea of its sentiments.

Before going to Weimar, Franz writes, he had known Wagner's writings only through the *Tannhäuser* score, which, detached from the action and other stage accessories, had not made a specially favorable impression on him: —

"Consequently I shared the aversion which almost all my musical colleagues felt toward the twofold rebel, and fancied that I was rendering full justice to my conscience if on the mention of Wagner's name I made the sign of a cross, contorted my features, and thought by myself, like the Pharisees, 'Lord, I thank thee,' etc."

He then relates, how, being as fond of poetry as of music, he had been hostile on principle to everything that had borne the name of opera: —

"I could find no unity in it. . . . Not only Meyerbeer and Flotow were the objects of my aversion, but my heresy extended to Mozart (N.B. on the stage) as well as to the others. . . . The opera mars the poetry, and by its dialogue and other pretty things mangles the music."

But *Lohengrin* changed all his views in a moment: —

"From the first bar on I was in the midst of it, and soon found myself in such complete sympathy with what was going on on the stage and in the orchestra that I actually felt during the whole performance as if I was singing and playing along."

Mozart's operatic music, he continues, "unfolds its full significance to me only in the concert hall." Not so with Wagner: —

"In my prejudice against all things operatic I had not considered it possible that music could to such a degree be moulded and subordinated to the action without losing its independence."

Of the orchestra, Franz says that it is

"a real fairy world, a true rainbow of tone-colors. Unheard-of combinations of sounds there are, but always of a beauty incomparable. The whole introduction to *Lohengrin* is a *Féerie*, and even with the critical spectacles on the nose one cannot escape a state of ecstatic gratification."

Concerning the vocal style of *Lohengrin*, which to-day seems so simple and melodious, Franz says: "It is difficult to understand how the singers can memorize melodic phrases like these, apparently written so much against the grain [*widerhaarig*]; and yet they assert that every note, once fixed in the memory, remains as if chiselled into the head." He then goes on to speak of Wagner's constant violation of traditional rules and forms: "yet, despite these abnormalities and monstrosities, he always hits the nail on the head, and gives us such music as was absolutely called for by the situation" — which reminds one of Beethoven's remarks on Weber's *Freischütz*, quoted in a previous chapter. Summing up his impressions, Franz concludes: —

"Whether it was the charm of the unheard, absolutely new, or something else, I cannot tell; I only know that very few musical works have ever so completely overwhelmed me, made such a 'demonic' impression on me, as *Lohengrin*. Wagner, thanks to his double endowment, is the only man who could write an opera which is a work of art in its fundamental conception."

In this last sentence Robert Franz states implicitly what editor Brendel of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* did not hesitate to utter explicitly — that the operas of Mozart, Weber, and Beethoven are inferior to Wagner's. To-day it seems funny that any one could have ever

doubted this, after hearing *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser;* but in 1853 it called for great courage on Brendel's part to give public expression to such an opinion — courage which Liszt alone shared.

Wagner had not met Franz at this time, but subsequently the two became good friends. Frequent mention is made of Franz in Wagner's letters, and there was also some personal correspondence between the two. When the score of *Lohengrin* was printed by Härtels, Wagner wrote to Uhlig that he was to receive one of the three presentation copies which he had reserved; adding: —

"A second I think of presenting to Robert Franz, and will send it to you to see that he gets it. I have really been intending for a long time to write to Franz. Heaven knows how one always puts off a thing of the sort, however agreeable it may be. Kind greetings to him, and assure him that I place great value on the fact that he — next to you and Liszt — was the first *musician* who showed me any friendship." [1]

On Nov. 10, 1852, he writes: —

"Franz has sent me his *Lieder;* as yet I have not looked at them, but I am promising myself great pleasure when I do. Please give him best greetings from me when you write."

And five years later (Oct. 29, 1857): —

"I have had German visitors. Ed. Devrient, Präger, and Röckel (from England), Robert Franz, etc., were this summer with me for a longer or shorter period, and we had a lot of music, — *Rheingold, Walküre,* and the two finished acts of *Young Siegfried.*"

At this period Wagner had learned to esteem Franz's songs so highly that they formed, with Bach's music, his

[1] He forgets Spohr and Meyerbeer, but of course effusions of this sort are not to be taken too literally.

daily food. That there was a natural artistic affinity between these two composers need hardly be pointed out: so far as the difference between lyric-song and music-drama permitted, Franz did for the vocal style of the *Lied* what Wagner did for the dramatic opera, by making the vocal melody coalesce with the poetry as the color of a rose does with its form.

FURTHER COMMENTS

In a preceding chapter brief reference was made to the circumstances under which the poem and music of *Lohengrin* were created. In writing the poem he took even greater pains than in *Tannhäuser* to preserve the local color of the historico-mythic subject as regards the scenic background and the poetic style. With the legend of Lohengrin he had become familiar as early as 1842, in Paris, in connection with the Tannhäuser subject; but the form of the legend as presented by an old Bavarian poet did not specially interest him at that time, and it was not till some years later, when he became familiar with the original and simpler form of the legend, that it aroused his musical imagination.

Like Shakespeare, and the great dramatists of Greece, he obtained the materials of his drama from various sources,[1] but welded them together and concentrated the action with an ingenuity which betrayed the born dramatist. A French critic, Anatole France, commends Wagner for freeing the old Lohengrin legend from its

[1] Those who are curious as regards the known and possible sources of Wagner's poem may consult Muncker's brief Wagner biography, or, for a more detailed account, an article by the same author in the Munich *Allgemeine Zeitung* (supplement) for May 30, 1891.

unsympathetic Gothic form, and presenting it in a modern spirit. As a matter of fact, the essence of the legend — the story of a bride who is punished for her curiosity in violation of a promise — is as old as literature, having its prototype in the tale of Cupid and Psyche, Jupiter and Semele, Pururavas and Urvasi in the Rig-Veda.[1] Those who like to exercise their fancy by giving stories an allegoric and biographic significance, may find food for thought by looking on Lohengrin as representing Genius. He seeks a wife who will believe in him, love him as a *man*, not as a god, *i.e.* a creative artist; and understand him through this love: but his higher nature does not escape detection; envy, doubt, and jealousy poison the heart of even that woman for whose succor he left his retreat. He finds he has only been worshipped, not loved and understood, and sorrowfully returns to his solitude.[2]

The admirers of Wagner, following his example, are much given to deriving his musical descent directly from Beethoven. His extraordinary admiration of Beethoven, which amounted almost to fanaticism,[3] might easily lead to the inference that he regarded himself as Beethoven's successor. But, apart from the suggestive use of poetry to assist instrumental music, in the Ninth Symphony, the composer in whom Wagner's music really has its roots is not Beethoven, but Weber. Weber was his first love, and to Weber he returned. He himself remarks in his essay on *Zukunftsmusik* (1860): —

[1] See Mr. Andrew Lang's article on Mythology, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, p. 158.

[2] This is Wagner's own version (IV. 362).

[3] The *index* of Glasenapp's *Wagner Encyclopædie* has *thirteen columns* of references to Beethoven found in Wagner's literary writings!

"Should the satisfaction be granted me of seeing my *Tannhäuser* well received by the Paris public too, I feel certain that I should owe this success in a large measure to the still very noticeable connection of this opera with those of my predecessors, among whom I call your attention especially to Weber."

Even more than *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* recalls the influence of Weber, in this case particularly *Euryanthe*, which in many ways Wagner seems to have taken as his model. Pohl and other writers have dwelt on the parallel between Euryanthe and Elsa, Eglantine and Ortrud, Lysiart and Telramund, in both their poetic and musical characterization. But Wagner's poem is of course infinitely superior to that of Weber's librettist, and if the difference in the music is much less great, the advantage is nevertheless on Wagner's side; and we can realize here, especially, the truth of Cornelius's remark, that "Weber died of the longing to become Wagner." On reading Weber's biography, we become convinced that he would have done almost what even the later Wagner did, had he had the daring, the energy, and the iron will of that reformer. But his life was too short, and his health too poor, to allow him to take up such a struggle; and so, contrary to his convictions, he had his "gallery," as he called his wife, whose duty was to warn him when he was in danger of forgetting the "public" while following his own ideal of a music-drama. That this ideal was the same as Wagner's in the most essential point is proved by these words of Weber's: —

"*Euryanthe* is a purely dramatic work, which depends for its success solely on the co-operation of the united sister-arts, and is certain to lose its effect if deprived of their assistance."

How far Weber succeeded in reaching this ideal is a

question which Wagner repeatedly discussed at considerable length.[1] To note only two interesting points. He admits that in the last scenes of *Euryanthe* "we are indebted to this delightful tone-poet for a complete realization of the ideal dramatic art," because here the orchestra does not simply accompany the dialogue, but "interpenetrates the recitatives as the blood does the veins of the body," and constantly keeps alive our interest by its use of characteristic motives appropriate to the situation. On the other hand, the chorus is not properly treated by Weber: —

> "In *Euryanthe* the dialogue of the actors is repeatedly interrupted and retarded by the song of the chorus, and unfortunately it sings here independently, after the manner of four-part male choruses, without the vitalizing accompaniment of a characterizing, animated orchestra, just as if the composer had intended these choruses to be available also as detached pieces for the programmes of the vocal societies."

In *Lohengrin*, on the other hand, the choruses are an organic, inseparable part of the score. In Wagner's operas the function of the Greek chorus of commenting on the action is assigned to the orchestra, which, through the use of Leading Motives, has received the faculty of definite speech; the chorus thus wins the freedom of taking part in the dramatic action. There is nothing more effective in *Lohengrin* (when properly done, which is not often the case) than the actions and the short exclamations of the chorus on the arrival of the swan, or on the appearance of Elsa. It might be argued, and justly, that the final choruses of the first two acts prove very effective in the concert hall too; but this does not

[1] See III. 358-361; IX. 57, 251; X. 216-220, etc.

make them any the less perfect on the stage, provided they are a natural outgrowth of the dramatic situation and appropriate to it, as they unquestionably are. From a purely musical point of view there are no grander choruses in existence than these, unless it be the concluding one in Bach's Passion Music or in the *Meistersinger*. Even the popular bridal chorus (which is now so often used as a wedding march), although it is the weakest thing in *Lohengrin*, is not really inconsistent with the spirit of a music-drama; for the melody beautifully fits the words, and the chorus is not an interloper, but grows naturally out of the situation.

Wagner was fond of comparing poetry to a husband and music to a wife, and he did not believe in "women's rights," his theory being that, in the music-drama at any rate, the masculine poetry should be "boss," and not the feminine music. In the individual rôles this principle is still more consistently carried out than in the choruses; how consistently is shown most graphically in the following passage from a letter to Liszt (Nov. 16, 1853), whence the reader will see clearly what is meant by saying that in *Lohengrin* "continuous melody" takes the place of the detached "numbers" of the old-fashioned opera, which were complete in themselves and could be taken out without alteration, while in *Lohengrin* the melody flows on without interruption or artificial close till the end of each act. To make *Lohengrin* more profitable from a publisher's point of view, Wagner had agreed to bring out a collection of single pieces from it for song and for piano: —

"We know that the so-called *morceaux détachés* really form the chief source of profit in the issue of operas: but such pieces it is

impossible to publish from *Lohengrin* on account of the peculiar circumstance that there are in this opera no single vocal pieces that can be detached just as they are. Only *I* myself, the composer, could undertake to detach a few of the most suitable vocal pieces from the score, completing them by recasting and rearranging, by adding a beginning and a close, etc. Nine of these pieces, short, easy, and even popular, I sent you some time ago with the request to forward them to Härtel after receiving word from me: they may appear as arranged *by me*."

Besides the continuous melody which, like a model wife, scorns to be "independent," but is inseparable from the "masculine" words, there is another respect in which we find Wagner's genius already at its best in *Lohengrin;* namely, in the marvellous homogeneity of coloring and general musical phraseology, which gives a unity to the whole opera and makes it an organic work of art. Play a dozen bars from *Lohengrin*, and any musical expert will tell you which of his operas it is from, even if he should not distinctly remember that particular phrase. The same could not be said of Mozart's *Don Juan* and *Figaro*, or two operas by any other composer; and herein lies one of the most profound evidences of Wagner's supreme dramatic genius.

Why, then, if *Lohengrin* is such a genuine work of art, should it be classed with the "operas" of Wagner's second period, instead of with the mature music-dramas?

Chiefly because, although the characteristic themes called Leading Motives are already used to a considerable extent in this opera, they do not yet make up the entire web of the score, as in the dramas that followed. The King, Elsa, Lohengrin, the Grail, and the swan, Ortrud, etc., have their musical correlatives or *Doppel-*

gänger in the score which recur again and again with deep dramatic significance (especially in the second act): but besides those there are also melodies that occur only once and have no typical dramatic meaning. One of the most exquisite of these is the eight bars which the orchestra plays in the bridal chamber while the King embraces the newly married couple and gives them his blessing.[1]

As distinguished from the typical or leading motives such passages might be called incidental or passing melodies, and there are many of them in this opera. The wealth of musical ideas in *Lohengrin* is, indeed, positively astounding, and makes one stand amazed at the lavish exuberance of the composer's imagination, as no other stage-work ever written except *Die Meistersinger* does. The second act alone has musical ideas enough to furnish forth a dozen ordinary operas of German, Italian, or French manufacture.

That this second act was the last to be appreciated by the public has its good reason in the fact that it was composed last of all, and marks the transition to Wagner's "third style," which begins with *Rheingold*. What especially distressed the old-fashioned opera-goers, who were accustomed to expect nothing but "sweet" music and "pretty" tunes in their operas, was the free use which Wagner made here of sombre colors and of discords, to express the emotion of *hate*. But here, as

[1] This beautiful passage is usually marred by being taken too fast, at march pace. Wagner knew what a good thing it was, and wrote to Liszt in 1853 that he had forgotten to note down a tempo mark in the score: "Here the tempo must become considerably *slower* still than at the first entrance of the D major; the passage must make a very cordial, solemn impression, or else the intention is lost."

usual, the very thing was found fault with which indicates the greatest progress and perfection. It is not only the prerogative but the *duty* of *dramatic* music to express all the emotions of the soul, those of hatred as well as those of love. In the second act of *Lohengrin*, the *tragic* elements of a drama are musically illustrated and intensified as never before on the musical stage; and these scenes more than foreshadow the dramatic perfection reached in *Siegfried* and *Tristan*. With an incompetent Ortrud and Telramund this episode is indeed dreary; but that is not Wagner's fault. When the vocalists are actors too, and can express hatred as well as love by their singing, then this part of the opera arouses more enthusiasm than any other, as I have often witnessed.

The composer Felix Draeseke has well described[1] how Wagner uses the orchestra to help in characterizing and individualizing his *dramatis personæ*: —

"Just as he makes use of special melodies to sketch the principal persons, so he also has attempted to secure the same end by means of the various clang-tints. Accordingly he uses — although, of course, not exclusively — the brass chiefly to accompany the King and the martial choruses; the high wood-wind to paint Elsa; the English horn and bass-clarinet to sketch Ortrud; the violins (especially in high 'harmonic' positions) to indicate the Grail and its representative knight. Yes, even the choice of keys appears to have been made with artistic deliberation. Or is it unintentional that Ortrud's appearance is almost always indicated musically in the key of F-sharp minor? is it unintentional that the four buglers always blow in C-major, and also greet the King's arrival always in C? Is it accidental that the key of A, which is the purest for strings and the most magic in effect on account of the greater ease

[1] *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, April 4, 1856.

of producing 'harmonic' tones, always announces the approach of Lohengrin and the Grail's intervention in the action?"[1]

The original and unconventional character of Wagner's instrumentation is illustrated by these remarks from the pen of L. C. Elson concerning the prelude to *Lohengrin*:—

"Wagner alone, of all the great masters, does not use the harp for celestial tone-coloring, but violins and wood-wind in prolonged notes, in the highest positions. Schumann, Berlioz, Saint-Saëns, in fact all the modern tone-colorists who have given celestial pictures, use the harp in them, purely because of the association of ideas which comes to us from the Scriptures, and this very association of the harp with heaven and the angels only came about because the instrument was the most developed possessed by man at the time that the sacred book was written. Wagner's tone-coloring is intrinsically the more ecstatic, and one cannot but agree with the sarcasm of Théophile Gautier, that a 'harp concert lasting ten thousand years must end by becoming tiresome.' Wagner is the first who has broken through this harp conventionality."

PROGRESS OF LOHENGRIN

About two months after the first performance of *Lohengrin* Wagner wrote to Uhlig, after mentioning the *Lohengrin* essay:—

"I am deeply touched by Liszt's untiring efforts to fan the flame of my fame with diabolic persistence. My Weimar friends imagine they can pave my way to the public at large by their wise measures: three performances of *Lohengrin* have now been given, and the result leads the local manager triumphantly to express the conviction that this opera is assured the same popularity in Weimar that *Tannhäuser* has won. So they all believe that nothing is needed except a few trifling concessions on my

[1] Compare with this Wagner's own extremely interesting remarks on the sequence of keys in the vocal contest in *Tannhäuser* (Liszt Letters, No. 78).

part, and zealous efforts on their part, to soon place the whole German operatic public at my disposition. I suppose I must appear crazy to them if, in answer to these messages, I persist in stubbornly maintaining that they are mistaken, and that such a thing is impossible."

Liszt had written him, after the second repetition, that *Lohengrin* was being more and more appreciated and understood, and that it was a work which would "confer more honor on an audience that showed itself capable of understanding and enjoying it, than the audience could confer on *it*, by applauding and making it a popular success." In May, 1851, the opera had reached its fifth performance, and Liszt wrote: —

"The house was filled, largely, it is true, by visitors brought by curiosity from Erfurt, Naumburg, and other neighboring towns; for, to be frank, the Weimar people, with the exception of about two dozen, are not so advanced yet as to be able to take a decisive interest in so extraordinary a work."

This custom of making a musical pilgrimage to Weimar for the sake of hearing Wagner's operas, came more and more into vogue, so that the Grand-Ducal town became a sort of preliminary Bayreuth for the *Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*. Special opera-trains were occasionally run, and in January, 1853, Liszt wrote to assure his friend that the public interest in *Lohengrin* was increasing rapidly, and "you are already very popular at the various Weimar hotels, where it is not easy to get a room on the days when your operas are given." And again, a year later: "*Tannhäuser*, as usual, drew a full house, and when *Lohengrin* was performed, many strangers who arrived in the afternoon could get no more tickets."

Wagner himself has best summed up the importance of Liszt's activity in Weimar, as conductor and essayist, in two letters to him (Nos. 52, 67), from which I must cite the following passages: —

"Truly, my friend, you have made of this small Weimar a real furnace of fame for me; when I look at the numerous detailed and often very clever articles on *Lohengrin* which now come from Weimar, and recall, in comparison, the envious hostility with which, *e.g.*, the Dresden critics fell on me, and with what melancholy perseverance they labored as if to create a systematic confusion regarding me in the public mind, Weimar appears to me as a blessed asylum in which at last I can breathe freely and relieve my oppressed heart."

"What you, but *you alone*, have succeeded in doing for me at Weimar so far is astounding, and has contributed still more to *my* success; *without you I would now be completely forgotten;* instead of which I have been brought to the public notice of art-friends by all the means which are at your disposal only, and which you have utilized with an energy and a success that alone make it possible for me even to think of carrying out such plans as I have just told you about [*The Nibelung's Ring*]. This plan is perfectly clear in my mind, and I declare you without hesitation the creator of my present position, which is perhaps not unpromising as regards the future."

When, in 1852, the score of *Lohengrin* appeared in print, Wagner immortalized his gratitude to Liszt in this cordial dedication: —

"It was you who awakened the mute notes of this score to the living world of sounds; without your rare devotion, my work would still sleep silently — forgotten perhaps even by myself — in some drawer among my furniture; no ear would have heard that which moved my heart and ravished my imagination when, always dreaming of a vivid execution, I composed this work five years ago. May it now resound and be heard in the world at large. That will be one consolation for me — for me who probably will never hear it."

Liszt had done his work and done it well. But it will always remain one of the most extraordinary facts in the history of music that, notwithstanding his Herculean labors, musical and literary, no other opera-house touched *Lohengrin* till three years after its first performance at Weimar. While Meyerbeer's *Prophète* was exciting unbounded enthusiasm all over Germany, not one of Wagner's four operas was performed during 1850 and 1851, except at Weimar! Wiesbaden and Dresden took up *Tannhäuser* in 1852, and in Dresden, also, this opera was resumed on Oct. 26, while in the following year no fewer than twenty-six other German cities[1] produced it; but *Lohengrin* had to wait till July 2, 1853, before Wiesbaden honored itself by being the first city after Weimar to bring out this magnificent work.

The next year Leipzig, Schwerin, Frankfurt, Darmstadt, Breslau, and Stettin followed the lead of Weimar and Wiesbaden, and in 1855, eight more cities — Cologne, Hamburg, Riga, Prague, Augsburg, Bonn, Düsseldorff, and Hanover — were added to the list; while, strange to say, some of the leading opera-houses waited longest before they opened their portals to *Lohengrin* — Munich and Vienna till 1858, Berlin till 1859, and Stuttgart even till 1869. That Berlin quarantined Wagner's opera nine years is strange, but not so strange as the fact that the same city (and the same Intendant) repeated the same farce with the Nibelung Tetralogy after 1876. That Leipzig was one of the first to produce *Lohengrin* was an unfortunate circumstance, owing to the poor equipment of the opera-house at that time, and the Mendelssohnian atmosphere, which was hostile to Wag-

[1] See the list in Glasenapp, I. 347.

nerian interests. The conductor, Julius Rietz, was a personal friend of Mendelssohn, and had no sympathy with Wagner. Nor did Wagner have any confidence in him, but insisted that Liszt should supervise the production of his opera. In a letter to Heine, dated Jan. 19, 1854, he says: —

"I only consented to the performance in Leipzig on condition that Liszt should represent me, if not as conductor, still as superintendent of the whole production; and he was to have the right to stop it if he saw there was no reasonable expectation of a favorable result. Now first do I learn that R. quite set up his back against this, and that the whole thing would long ago have come to a rupture had it not been that the Härtels [publishers of the score] effected a prudent compromise through Liszt's complaisance, whereby the latter was only to drop in at the last rehearsal, and perhaps give a few friendly hints to R. Now it appears that Liszt did not even receive notice of the date of these rehearsals, and he has had the somewhat too diplomatic weakness of leaving the affair to take its own course, for good or bad. But that was certainly not my intention, and so the performance has taken place entirely against my will. I shall take other precautions for the future."

The result of this performance was what might have been anticipated. It was such a wretched affair that Wagner could justly refer to it (in the same letter) as "the latest Leipzig outrage on my *Lohengrin*." Liszt wrote him a full account of it (No. 143 of the Correspondence), from which it appears that the performance actually broke down in several places; and although he adds once more "your *Lohengrin* is the most magnificent work of art the world at present possesses," this could hardly console Wagner for the fiasco of his favorite opera in one of the leading German cities. A good share of this failure was of course due to the "big head" of Con-

ductor Rietz, who fancied he knew more about bringing out the new opera than Wagner himself or his *alter ego* Liszt. Wagner ran against many such "big heads" in his career, and these pleasant experiences account for his frequent severe or sarcastic references to *Kapellmeisters* and *Kapellmeistermusik*. The critics, to be sure, pronounced these references improper and impertinent — for ought he not to have been grateful to have his operas performed at all?

One unfortunate result of the Leipzig experiment with *Lohengrin* was that an intending purchaser in Berlin of Wagner's rights to his scores was intimidated. "My agent writes me," he says in a letter to Liszt (No. 144), "that after *such* a success he found it impossible to clinch the bargain with the man, who had already seemed most willing to accept it," and who had been advised to await the results at Leipzig. Another unfortunate circumstance was that the extensive and injudicious cuts which Rietz had made in the score were thenceforth for many years looked on as authoritative, and copied at most other German theatres, when *Lohengrin* was first produced.

However, in spite of wretched performances at Leipzig and elsewhere, — the reports of which kept the exiled Wagner on pins and needles, — *Lohengrin* gradually and triumphantly made its way in Germany and outside of Germany. True, the opera was twenty-one years old when it entered England and Russia (London in June 1868, and St. Petersburg in October of the same year); twenty-three when it entered Belgium (Brussels, March 22, 1870); twenty-four when first heard in Italy (Bologna, 1871), and twenty-three when it crossed the ocean to America (New York, 1870), while Paris did not hear it

till it was forty-four years old. But in most of these countries it became, in course of the following two decades, the most popular of all operas. In London, at present, it draws larger audiences than any other opera, German, Italian, or French; it was given ten times in the season of 1890–1891. In Brussels, during the same season it had twenty-seven performances, or six more than the next popular opera. In Italy Wagner's operas (mostly *Lohengrin*) had seventy performances during the season 1889–1890. At the Grand Opera in Paris ten of the sixteen performances given in November, 1891, were devoted to *Lohengrin*, while the total number from Sept. 16, 1891, to Sept. 16, 1892, was sixty-one. But it is in Germany, the home of modern opera, that the triumph of *Lohengrin* is most emphatically revealed by statistics. In the season 1890–1891, *Lohengrin* was heard 263 times (as against 248 in the preceding season) in seventy German and Austrian cities, the opera next in popularity being *Tannhäuser* with 247 performances (as against 189 in 1889–1890). In Berlin *Lohengrin* had its three hundredth performance on Oct. 16, 1892.

CRITICAL PHILISTINES AND PROPHETS

Statistics are usually considered dry reading, but the figures in the preceding paragraph can hardly be called uninteresting, for they reveal an important fact — the fact that *Lohengrin* is to-day the most popular work in the world's operatic repertory. It is accepted, without a dissentient voice, as a classical masterwork, and most persons will find it difficult to believe that it should have ever been regarded otherwise. Indeed, there is a general impression that this opera *was* received with approval

from the beginning, and that the critical opposition to Wagner did not begin till he brought out the works of his later style — especially *Tristan* and the *Nibelung's Ring*. No less a personage than J. Weber, one of the leading French critics, wrote in the Paris *Temps*, as late as May 10, 1887, that "*Lohengrin* is the only one of Wagner's works which was never attacked, which made its way and was received everywhere without opposition." When so well-informed a man could make such a grievous error, it is hardly to be wondered at that the general public should be misinformed. The following anthology of *Lohengrin* criticisms will therefore prove as surprising to most of my readers as it is certainly amusing, and as it ought to be instructive and a warning to those who persist in decrying Wagner's later works as "unintelligible and cacophonous," while admitting that they like the earlier ones — ignorant of the fact that these earlier ones were once equally denounced as being "unintelligible and cacophonous." The operas have not changed, but the hearers' mental powers have changed and grown; and if they will listen to the later works attentively, their minds will grow still more.

Shortly after the Weimar performance of *Lohengrin*, Lobe wrote in the Leipzig *Signale:* —

> "Shall future generations laugh at our time, so boastful of the spirit of progress, as we now laugh at Schaul and other opponents of Mozart in former days? Are we men of progress? Yes, as far as words go! In reality we are creatures of habit who dread every effort and spend our time criticising, ridiculing, and persecuting the few energetic individuals whom the *Zeitgeist* has thrown among us, and passing over their vigorous doings with a yawn."

In plain English, Lobe asked his critical colleagues

if they would once more make fools of themselves and discredit their profession *in re* Wagner; and this is the way they answered his question: —

Moritz Hauptmann (whose letters on music have been lately translated into English) wrote in 1859 of a *Lohengrin* performance: "We found it difficult to stay to the end, and made up our minds never again to attend an opera of this sort." Apparently this was not the first time that the eminent Hauptmann had heard this opera, for on March 7, 1854, he wrote from Leipzig: —

"The third performance of *Lohengrin* was given before an empty house, and so was the fourth, at reduced prices, for which so many had waited. . . . Now it would be easy to forgive a man for not having the ability to do this or that. But the silly, stupid vanity which brings forth and would force on people such a very defective work as the only true thing — that is the aggravating and really contemptible part of this affair." [1]

Twelve years later, when *Lohengrin* was revived in Berlin, one of the leading local critics, Otto Gumprecht, lamented "the cruel necessity imposed on him by his duty" to attend a performance of this opera and "allow his ears to be assaulted for three hours by the most pitiless of all composers." He declared the music "a disagreeable precipitate of nebulous theories, a frosty, sense-and-soul-congealing tone-whining." ("Frosty whining" is good.) Thirteen years later, the same critic still found this score to be "an abyss of *ennui*," and its

[1] Perhaps it was not so strange that Hauptmann could not understand Wagner's music, inasmuch as he had not yet caught up with Weber, or even with Gluck. On page 143 of his Letters (German edition) he says: "There is always something amateurish about Weber, wherefore it is silly to place him in the front rank of composers, where Gluck also does not belong, on account of his lack of skill in artistic elaboration"!

principal characteristic, "garrulous triviality"! Another Berlin critic wrote that "nine-tenths of the score consist of miserable, utterly inane phrases." "The whole instrumentation . . . breathes an impure atmosphere." "Every sentiment for what is noble and dignified in art protests against such an insult to the very essence of music." And the only Berlin critic who spoke for *Lohengrin*, Ernst Kossak, did so, as he confessed, "at the risk of being stigmatized as a barbarian by the believers in classical dogmatism."[1] Kossmaly (*Echo*, 1873) called *Lohengrin* "a caricature of music," while another German critic, Gustav Engel, admitted in 1859 that this opera "has the value of a curiosity, and that is something for the critics at any rate." Seven years later Engel wrote that "the music of *Lohengrin* is blubbering baby-talk" (*eine kindlich stammelnde Sprache*), and his friend Gumprecht opined that it was "formlessness reduced to a system."

The eminent Viennese critic, Dr. Hanslick, declared (1858) the composer of *Lohengrin* "an anti-melodious fanatic." The opera, he says, "lacks specific dramatic power, and only shows a lyric gift and uncommon theatric cleverness." In 1869 Hanslick wrote: "I was sanguine enough to believe that Wagner would, in his later operas, avoid the unmusical, the morbid, the spiritually masked triviality of his earlier ones. The reverse has happened; every new opera (following *Tannhäuser*) has become more unmelodious, tedious, noisy, and abstruse." And as late as 1875 this wonderful critic expressed his sympathy for the tenor Herr Müller by advising him not to ruin

[1] Tappert, *Richard Wagner*, p. 60, and his *Wagner Lexicon*, *Wörterbuch der Unhöflichkeit*.

his artistic career by persisting in impersonating the knight of the swan (he "wittily" advises him "den gefiederten Einspänner so bald als möglich wieder abzudanken").

When Germans could write such rubbish about one of the greatest works of art ever written in their country, it was hardly to be expected that foreigners would show better sense. An Italian critic wrote after the performance of *Lohengrin* at Milan (1873), "Such algebraic harmonies may at most succeed in Germany, and only in Germany; here we ask for melody and song, not for declaiming vocalists." The most eminent Italian critic of this country, Filippo Filippi, gives (in the first pages of his *Viaggio nelle Regione del Avenire*) an amusing account of the way in which Wagner was up to that date (1870) spoken of in Italy, where he was chiefly known through *Lohengrin*: —

"Not only do people assert that this music (which they do not know) is the negation of art, of melody, of common sense, but the mere hearing of it has been decried as a real *jettatura*, as harmful, and even serious journals have asserted that attendance at a Wagner opera is followed by jaundice, smallpox, cholera, and heaven only knows what other calamities! And of the poor tenor who died while he sang in one of Wagner's operas, they say that he succumbed to the noxious influences of the music of the future. To the most malicious criticisms of these works are added attacks on the personality of their composer, on his exclusiveness and his immeasurable vanity, which latter is after all a trait common to all great men."

In France there is almost as extensive a Wagner literature as in Germany, and two books have appeared there especially devoted to a consideration of the opinions on Wagner passed by a multitude of writers, while a third

contains a collection of Wagner caricatures.[1] Among the opponents, the fiercest and most formidable, because of his authority and influence, was Fétis père — the same who had the audacity to "correct" the harmonies in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and the same who, as we saw in the chapter on *Tannhäuser*, found that Wagnerism was on the wane in Germany — the year before the first Bayreuth festival.

Fétis wrote (1852) that "Wagner's efforts tend to transform art by means of a system, not through inspiration. And why this? Because he lacks inspiration, because he has no ideas, because he is conscious of his weakness in this respect and seeks to disguise it." Fétis also discovered that Wagner "suppresses melody and rhythm" — which is surely an offence that ought to have called for police interference.

In the last volume of Fétis's *Biographie des Musiciens* (1875), in the course of some remarks on the *Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*, we come across this profound solution of the question why people take an interest in Wagner: —

"A few spectators honestly admired this music, which they did not understand; others were greatly bored by it; but the Germans have a wonderful faculty for allowing themselves to be patiently bored in the theatre without leaving their places. There was much talk about *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, and that sufficed to make everybody want to hear them. To-day [1875] this curiosity is gratified, and indifference has followed. This music, which was to be that of the future, is already that of the past."

After this crushing blow at Wagnerism, it seems

[1] George Servières, *R. Wagner Jugé en France; Les Ennemis de Wagner* (of this I have not been able to get a copy); J. Grand-Carteret, *Wagner en Caricatures*.

hardly worth while to quote other French criticisms. Two more choice samples may, however, be added; Felix Clément says in his *Dictionnaire des Opéras* concerning *Lohengrin*, that the score is "above all, wearisome"; and of the Prelude he says: —

> "In spite of the enthusiasm of the German colony," — note the sly insinuation, — "the hearers of this *symphonie*, which is too elaborate to merit the name of prelude, could not see in it anything but a sequence of acoustic effects, a crescendo cleverly managed, a persistent tremolo on the first string and leading up to a sonorous entry of the brass instruments — and all this *without the shadow of an idea;* it is an audacious defiance of everything that people have hitherto agreed to call music."

The eminent Parisian critic, Scudo, heard some Wagner selections in 1860. He found the *Tannhäuser* march satisfactory, but this same *Lohengrin* prelude proved too much for him, and he described it as "strange sounds, curious harmonies which do not keep together and lead to no tangible idea. One might compare it to an organist trying a new instrument, and running his fingers at random over the keyboard to note the sound of the different stops." 'Nuff said. And yet this chaotic thing continues to haunt our concert-halls and opera-houses to the present day!

England and America have had their *Lohengrin* critics and prophets, second to none. But there is room here for only two specimens. In 1856 the New York *Times's* critic wrote about Wagner: "It seems to us extremely improbable that he will excite any enthusiasm as a composer . . . The entire opera of *Lohengrin*, from beginning to end, does not contain a dozen bars of melody. It is the wildest kind of rambling, utterly destitute of form

or sequence," etc. The eminent English musical historian and teacher, Dr. John Hullah, heard *Lohengrin* as late as 1875 and wrote that he found it dull. "It will attract for a time," he prophesies; "but that works after the manner of *Lohengrin*, which — accepting the word 'music' in the sense for some centuries past given to it — may be described as *operas without music*, should take any permanent hold on the human soul, is to us simply inconceivable." (The italics are Hullah's.)

For the climax of the case against *Lohengrin* we must return for a moment to Germany. To Otto Jahn, the well-known biographer of Mozart, belongs the distinction of having perpetrated the most virulent of all the attacks on Wagner's early operas. Some of his remarks on *Tannhäuser* have already been quoted. *Lohengrin* he belabors even more savagely, in an essay of more than fifty pages, at the end of which the thought that principally forces itself on the reader's mind is, "Why should so great a man as Otto Jahn have wasted so much time and space in demolishing so contemptible and pitiable a freak as *Lohengrin?*" According to Jahn, there is hardly a redeeming feature, poetic or musical, in the whole opera. What he considers its faults may be inferred from one or two specimens. He objects to Elsa as being merely "a girl with weak nerves." But why on earth should not Elsa be a girl with weak nerves? Must every character in an opera or play be a model of perfection, moral and physical? What a bungler Shakespeare was, for instance, when he created such characters as Cordelia's sisters! Jahn, like so many German critics, seems to have derived his ideas of what a drama should be from Sunday-school books, in which there are only

angels and devils and no characters with merely human weaknesses.

Of one of the gems of the opera, "Athmest du nicht mit mir" (Breathest thou not with me), Jahn says that "the hearer is tortured and dragged through a saccharine bombast of harmonies that make one's hair stand on end, and that are as anti-natural and untrue as the romantic rhetoric of the text-words." Let any reader of this book look up this passage, in the third act of the opera, and then marvel at German criticism of forty years ago! Filippo Filippi says of this same passage that "it is exquisite, one might almost say *à la* Gounod, were it not that Wagner wrote it before Gounod." The same Italian critic was delighted with Wagner's novel use of Leading Motives. Towards the close of the last act, when Lohengrin leaves Elsa, he says, "the music of the first act with the theme of the Holy Grail recurs again; we hear the melodies which had announced the mysterious swan-boat and which now accompany it back. This musical repetition produces a magic effect; even unbelieving sceptics and atheists feel themselves surrounded by a mystic atmosphere of religious exaltation." And what does the German Jahn say about this same device of the Leading Motive? He calls it "the crude materialism of superficial signs"!

Even in Wagner's harmonies there is nothing new, according to Jahn. He admits, however, that they are often "striking," and, as he wittily adds, they are like a man going about in a social gathering and boxing everybody's ears — "mitunter hagelt es förmlich Püffe — sometimes it actually *hails* blows." The chorus, too, falls under Jahn's ban. "There is not a trace of dra-

matic individuality in the choruses," he says, adding that "the chorus takes no part in the action and almost every time might as well sing behind the scenes." The conclusion is that *Lohengrin* is an ephemeral work, "although it may deceive the public awhile because it meets the faults and weaknesses of its time."

Now it might be urged in defence of Jahn and his venomous colleagues that their astounding verdict may have been due in part to imperfect performances, which failed to do justice to the composer's intentions. The imputation that "the chorus does not act," for instance, may have been, and probably was, true in the slipshod Leipzig performance of 1854 on which Jahn's article (which appeared first in the periodical *Die Grenzboten*) was based; and the same might be said of other details. But Jahn cannot lay this flattering unction to his soul, for he reprinted this essay many years later in book form, unaltered. And have not as distinguished critics as he repeated *bêtises* like his after the excellent *Nibelung* and *Parsifal* performances at Bayreuth? No! It was stupidity pure and simple; stupidity alone accounts for such criticisms as have been quoted in the preceding pages — a mental opaqueness which has not only a musical and æsthetic, but a psychological and Darwinian interest.

But halt! Perhaps, after all, we are doing Wagner's enemies a gross injustice. One of the Archphilistines in the realm of music, Mr. Joseph Bennett, wrote this remarkable confession in the London *Musical Times* of April, 1884: —

"It is best for music when some divinely gifted singer, like Beethoven, or Schubert, or Schumann, lives a life of heavy bur-

dens, sore discouragements, and heavy trials. This is the true school for one who has to speak from heart to heart, and from the fulness of his own experience, to touch the chords of feeling in others."

Can it be that we have here the revealed secret of a huge international conspiracy of critics such as the world has never seen before? Yes, it must be so! Did not Rossini spend the last thirty-nine years of his life in idleness, simply because he had become rich and famous too soon? And did not everybody lament the loss of half a dozen or a dozen more operas like *William Tell* which Rossini might have given to the world had he not become rich and famous too soon? Did not Meyerbeer, also, rich and famous, become excessively unproductive in his later years? Should Wagner — who, after *Rienzi*, seemed likely to be the successor of Rossini and Meyerbeer — be allowed to degenerate in the same way, to the eternal loss of the musical world? Should all experience be thrown to the winds? No and never! So they put their heads together, these wise and benevolent critics did, and resolved to do everything they could to prevent Wagner from sharing the fate of Rossini and Meyerbeer. And they succeeded. Wagner did not become rich and famous too soon, he did not cease creating to his last years, and — his fame has gone on increasing from year to year, while that of the other two masters, the protégés of all the critics, is as rapidly decreasing. And for this result, paradoxical as it may seem, the admirers of Wagner have to thank his enemies!

LITERARY PERIOD

SIX YEARS LOST TO MUSIC

CRITICS, critics, everywhere, and not a word of praise: was it a wonder that, after such treatment at the hands of the musical "experts," mostly old men of the old school, Wagner should have written to his friend Uhlig: "Halten wir uns an die Jugend,—das Alter lasst verrecken, an dem ist nichts zu holen—let us cling to the young generation and let the old ones rot,—there is nothing to hope for from them."

Had the musical judges possessed the insight of Liszt, had they understood that the highest function of criticism is the discovery of genius and the proclaiming of its merits to the world at large, Wagner would perhaps have never joined the revolutionary movement; he would have avoided his ten years' exile, and probably continued to write a new opera every year or two for immediate performance at the Dresden theatre. But the calamity had now happened, he was an outcast from his fatherland, unable further to superintend the production of his works. The hostility of the press, combined with the incompetence of singers and conductors, and the rarity with which even tolerably correct performances of his operas were given, convinced him, moreover, of the uselessness of writing any more operas until the old ones

had had at least partial justice done them. He was determined, however, to make the world understand and appreciate him, one way or another, and, in his enforced absence from the theatrical playground his only resource was the essayist's pen. So he sat down and wrote a number of theoretical treatises which were to help pave the way for his operas. And thus it happened that he could write to Liszt, on Dec. 17, 1853, "For five years I have not written any music."

Five years — nay, six years, six of the best years of his life, immediately following the completion of *Lohengrin* — the greatest dramatic composer the world has ever seen did not write a note! Do you realize what that means? It means that the world lost two or three immortal operas, which he might have, and probably would have, written in these six years had not an unsympathetic world forced him into the rôle of an aggressive reformer and revolutionist.

It is true, the theoretical works which we owe to this period have their value too; but two extra Wagner operas would be infinitely greater treasures to the world than the essays and books entitled *Art and Revolution* (1849), *Art and Climate*, *Art-Work of the Future* (1850), *Opera and Drama* (1851), *Judaism in Music* (1852), and even than the autobiographic *Communication to My Friends* (1851), which these years brought forth. With the exception of the last part of *Opera and Drama*, these writings are not among Wagner's best literary productions, and some of them are so dry, abstruse, and uninteresting that only an enthusiast for his operas could ever be expected to work his way through them from beginning to end. In some of his earlier and later

essays, where he writes more specifically about theatric and musical affairs, he is one of the most direct and forcible writers of Germany: there are pages which by their vivid, concise, and incisive style equal the best of Heine and Schopenhauer. But at this time Wagner had not yet come under the literary and philosophical influence of Schopenhauer. It was a vastly inferior philosopher whose style and thought he then copied — Ludwig Feuerbach, to whom, in fact, *The Art-Work of the Future* is dedicated by his "grateful admirer," the author.[1] In his letters there are frequent references to Feuerbach. In one of them he asks Uhlig to send him a complete set of that writer's works, and in another he relates that Feuerbach had written to him "that he failed to understand how there could be *two* opinions about my book; that he had read it with enthusiasm, with rapture, and must assure me of his deepest sympathy and warmest thanks." Imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, Feuerbach could not but feel flattered; but it is to be regretted that Wagner ever came under the influence of this nebulous writer on social and religious topics, as it led him to speculate and write on various abstruse subjects in the old-fashioned German metaphysical style, which is anything but entertaining or instructive, as it deals chiefly with conjectures, theories, and random assertions, concrete facts being scornfully ignored. There is also, in these essays, a certain sophomoric bombast which in music the composer had got rid of with *Rienzi*, but which in the newer field of literature still oppresses him — and the reader. Yet there are, even in these essays, some delightfully luminous pages, while parts of

[1] In the reprint, this dedication is significantly omitted.

Opera and Drama are, in form and substance, among the most fascinating and important contributions ever made to musical history, criticism, and æsthetics.

ART AND REVOLUTION

Concerning the first of these theoretical works Liszt frankly wrote to Wagner, after the latter had informed him that his *Opera and Drama* was completed: "I shall be very glad to receive your new work; perhaps I shall on this occasion grasp your ideas definitely, which I did not quite succeed in doing with your *Art and Revolution;* in that case I may dish it up with a French sauce." If even high-priest Liszt could not perceive the drift of *Art and Revolution,* we may feel assured that a "French sauce" was needed in its case too, to make it palatable. The gist of the essay lies in a comparison of modern art (1850) with ancient Greek art. The Greek artist was *conservative,* because his art was part of the national life; theatres were temples, and tragic performances religious ceremonies in which the whole populace took part. Modern art, on the contrary, has degenerated into the luxury of a few; instead of the thirty thousand Greeks who witnessed the ancient tragedies of the great poets, we have a few hundred bankers and merchants who lounge into the theatre of an evening, all tired out with the day's hard labor, and therefore unwilling to apply their mind to anything serious, but ready to accept such frivolity and frippery as the Italian opera; with here a pretty tune, there a graceful skip of a dancer, here a gaudy scenic effect, there a volcanic outburst of the orchestra, and the whole without any artistic coherence. In face of such a state of affairs, a real artist cannot be conserva-

tive, but must be *revolutionary*. To use Wagner's own words: "With us true art is revolutionary because it can exist only in opposition to current practices." Greek practices were æsthetic; modern life is utilitarian. We are not even superior to the Greeks in the matter of slavery: in reality the slave has not become free, but all the free have become slaves — slaves to incessant toil in shops and factories, which finally drives all but utilitarian thoughts and principles out of private minds and public institutions.

Commercialism has been the ruin of art; art itself has become commercial: —

> "What made the architect revolt when he had to waste his genius on barracks and flats? Why did the painter grieve when he was compelled to portray the hideous physiognomy of the millionnaire? Why the musician when he had to compose music for the dining-room? Why the poet when he had to write novels for the circulating library? Because he had to waste his creative power to earn his bread and butter, because he had to make a trade of his art! But what must the *dramatist* suffer when he wishes to unite all the arts into the highest art-work, the drama? All the tortures of the other artists combined."

It is such reflections as these that led Wagner to write to F. Heine "that our whole public art is no art, but only art-journeymanship, — that it, with all the foundations on which it is built, must go unpitied to the devil."

What is to be done to remedy this state of affairs? Wagner's suggestion is eminently characteristic, but in this case entirely utopian. He calls upon statesmen to free the arts from the yoke of commercialism, to enable artists to create once more for art and not for money, and to begin with the theatre, because of its great influence.

The state should support the theatre and those who contribute to its work, and *admission should be free to all.*

Wagner here obviously speaks *pro domo*, but he forgets that statesmen are powerless to do such a thing unless they are backed up by public sentiment; and public sentiment to-day, in art matters, is unfortunately not what it was in the Greece of Pericles, when public funds were voted for other than utilitarian purposes, and when, as Aristotle expresses it, every citizen was a judge of art. Wagner's plan, at the same time, reveals his colossal egotism: for it is easy to read between the lines that the chief object of his revolutionary ideal — political, social, and artistic — was to pave the way for correct performances and general appreciation of his own music-dramas. Liszt and Uhlig could not understand such a mammoth egotism, hence they found the drift of his essay obscure. But we who know how Wagner succeeded, twenty-seven years later, in reproducing at Bayreuth a sort of Greek Olympic Festival, have no difficulty in interpreting his vague utterances in *Art and Revolution* as a sort of preliminary heralding of the Bayreuth plan, which, indeed, took clear shape in his mind two years later.

THE ART-WORK OF THE FUTURE

When a man writes an essay, especially a revolutionary essay, he is naturally anxious that it should attract some attention. It was Uhlig's self-assumed duty to see that his exiled friend's writings should receive some notice. "Only one thing is important," Wagner wrote to him: "that they be read as much as possible; and whatever will tend to this pleases me. That they should be attacked is quite natural, and a

matter of indifference to me. I bring no reconciliation to worthlessness, but war to the knife." This "war to the knife" was continued in a new essay which he wrote as soon as *Art and Revolution* was off his hands. Whenever Wagner undertook a new task, — musical or literary, — he concentrated all his powers on it, and everything else, for the moment, dwindled into insignificance. "I have been seized with a furious desire to produce a new literary composition," he wrote to Uhlig, on Oct. 26; and on the same date Heine received a letter containing this characteristic information: —

"Now that I have at last got into a quiet home here, my fingers are absolutely burning to write my pamphlet, *The Art-Work of the Future*, the composing and issuing of which have become to me a veritable heart-need. The work is instinctively expanding itself under my hands to the full — and, as I now see, to its necessary — proportions; and — I think you know me — when I have anything of this kind on my mind, I curse the time which I must spend on eating, sleeping, and necessary recreation, and for which I must twitch off a corner from my appetite for work. For nothing in the world, then, could I force myself to devote a morning to letter-writing."

In due course of time the new essay was sent to Uhlig for discussion. But again his poor apostle seems to have had difficulty in grasping its drift, and Wagner was quite right in conjecturing that he "must have expounded it badly." Though full of interesting ideas it is not a model of lucid exposition. But we get its gist in this explanation: —

"But if I wish to show that plastic art, being artificial — only an art abstracted from true art — must cease entirely in the future; if to this plastic art — painting and sculpture — claiming nowadays to be principal art, I deny life in the future, you will allow

that this should not, and could not, be done with two strokes of the pen."

Quite so. He devotes no less than 167 pages to this astounding task. He tries to show how the arts went to the devil, because, after the days of Greek tragedy, each one tried to go its own way; and that the only way to recreate the true art-work — the "art-work of the future" — is to reunite these arts in the music-drama. There is something almost sublime in the egotism which makes Wagner argue at such length that lifeless sculpture should disappear in the living, moving actor; that the only true painter is the landscape artist who provides scenery for the theatre; that the chief and highest function of the architect is to build temples of art; and that the poet should be merged in the musician. Liszt was right in saying that Wagner was inspired by *fanaticism* for his art. We smile at the thought that a man of thirty-six should have boiled over with such youthful enthusiasm for his own profession that everything else must be brushed aside to make way for it; but we also see that this ebullition of destructive lava is the normal state of a young volcano; and after reflecting on these points we pardon the bad style of the essay, and gratefully note the numerous admirable aphorisms and aperçus on all the arts, especially on music, which are scattered throughout *The Art-Work of the Future.*

After this essay had been disposed of, its author declared that "this will have been my last literary work," and to Liszt he wrote: "I am now free from all inclination to theorize, and have got so far as to feel a desire to devote myself to artistic creation alone." But three weeks later the wind blows from another quarter: "After

this piece of writing I was so determined to do no more literary work of that kind that now I must laugh at myself; from all sides necessity urges me to put pen to paper again." An essay would at any rate put a few florins in his empty pocket. Accordingly, the editor of the Stuttgart *Deutsche Monatshefte* soon received one of those ponderous metaphysical disquisitions which seem to flourish on German soil, and which express abstrusely in sixteen pages what might have been put concretely in six. It was entitled *Art and Climate*, and was written, as the author explained, "to expose the lazy, cowardly, preposterous objection of 'climate,' in all its emptiness"; that is, in answer to objections which had been made to his first theoretic essay, that climatic conditions would prevent a recurrence of the phenomena of Greek national art-culture in a more northern latitude. On the contrary, Wagner argues, it is not in tropical countries that art-culture, like other forms of civilization, flourishes best, but in regions where a constant fight with the elements develops man's powers.

"Not in the rank tropics, not in the voluptuous flower land India, was *true* art born, but in the naked sea-girt rocks of *Greece;* on the stony soil and under the scant shade of the olive tree stood its cradle; for here Hercules suffered and fought amidst privations, and here true man was first born."

OPERA AND DRAMA

We come now to the longest and by far the most important of these early theoretical treatises, a work of 407 pages entitled *Oper und Drama*. The reception given to the preceding literary efforts had hardly been of a nature to encourage his persevering in that direction.

"I anticipated," he writes, "that, in general, no further notice would be taken of them; but, only with a deep sigh do I at last perceive that even by the few of our own party who took notice of them, they were quite misunderstood. Prejudice has such a firm hold that only life itself can break it." Nevertheless, he persevered; for what else should he do? He needed money badly, and these essays brought him at least enough to pay his household expenses for a few weeks. To write any more operas was useless, since the last one he had composed had been neglected for three years and was being neglected three more after its Weimar *première*. "So now," he writes to Uhlig, "the choice as to what to do next tortured me: was it to be a poem, a book, or an essay? I seemed to myself so capricious, and all my doings so unprofitable and unnecessary." Various projects were in his mind. Liszt wanted him to compose *Siegfried's Death;* then he thought of writing a poem on the subject of Achilles, or essays on the Redemption of Genius or the Unbeauty of Civilization.

To Liszt he wrote about the same time: "To do literary work I have no longer a strong inclination: I preach after all to deaf ears." Nevertheless he took his pen again and devoted four months of incessant labor to the most elaborate of all his literary productions. In this, he says, he spared no pains to be exact and complete; for which reason he at once made up his mind not to hurry, so as not to be superficial. When he first entered on his task, he intended to call the new essay *The Nature of the Opera* (Das Wesen der Oper), but as it gradually expanded, he chose the title of *Opera and Drama.* As usual, he worked at this "with fanatic diligence," to use

his own words; and, as usual, he made a "tidy copy" of it, revised and corrected, for Uhlig, who was to find a publisher for it in Germany. In February, 1851, he wishes the "hateful manuscript" out of his hands, and writes that he expects to finish the whole about March. In June he gave some private lectures at Zürich to a number of friends and acquaintances, in which he read parts of his essay. Selections from it also appeared in periodicals, as that would "attract attention" to them; and it was not till September that the whole appeared in book form. The success of this book appears to have been greater than that of the preceding ventures; for, six months later, Wagner reports the sales as "highly satisfactory," and adds that the publisher gives him hopes of the possibility of a second edition. He had intended to ask sixty louis d'or (= $240) for *Oper und Drama*. What he finally received, after applying to several publishers, was twenty louis d'or at once, and the promise of the same sum after the sale of the first edition of five hundred copies. Only $80 for four months' hard labor. Five dollars a week! Well might he exclaim, after narrating his good fortune in at last finding a publisher: "But,— if I were compelled to live by my pen!"

While he was at work on *Oper und Drama*, he pronounced it of "the most extraordinary importance" to himself, and hoped that to others, also, it would prove not unimportant. "The first part," he wrote to Uhlig, "is the shortest and easiest, perhaps also the most interesting; the second goes deeper, and the third . . . is a work which . . . goes to the bottom of the matter."

This "bottom" was obviously too deep for the musical writers of that period. They could not fathom the pur-

port of his new art-theories, nor — so far as they did not maliciously and intentionally misrepresent them — as was done very often, and is still done occasionally — were they entirely to blame for this. For, apart from the occasional obscurity and frequent abstruseness of his literary style, both reader and writer were hampered by the fact that no concrete illustrations could be taken from existing works of art to elucidate some of his new principles.

At the beginning Wagner points out that heretofore operatic composers had committed the fundamental mistake of making the Music their principal object and the Drama merely a means, whereas, in truth, the Drama should be the principal object and the Music a means toward its complete realization. Consequently he devotes only the first part of his treatise to the subject of operatic music ("The Opera and the Nature of Music"), while the second considers "The Drama and the Nature of Dramatic Poetry"; and in the third he discusses "Poetry and Music in the Drama of the Future."

The least important of these three sections is the second, in which the author, after expressing his aversion to mere literary or book dramas (which are not intended for stage-representation), goes on to describe the origin of the modern drama from the romance, and then discusses the plays and principles of Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Racine, etc. In Part III. (which is perhaps the most original and valuable musico-æsthetic treatise in existence) he considers the problem of mythical *versus* historic subjects of opera; alliteration *versus* rhyme; the use of Leading Motives; the question, should poet and musician be two persons or one? the value of

the German, French, and Italian languages for operatic purposes (the preference being given to German); the relation of the operatic singer to the orchestra; symphonic form compared with operatic form; harmonic melody *versus* dance melody; gesture and pantomime; instrumentation; the function of the chorus in the music-drama, etc.

EVOLUTION OF THE OPERA

The first part of *Opera and Drama*, which treats of the evolution of the opera, was chiefly responsible for the fact that this essay attracted so much more attention than its predecessors. Most readers prefer personal criticisms to abstract discussion, and the first part of the essay appealed to this taste by being a sketch of operatic history with special reference to the composers who are most conspicuous therein. Wagner did not hesitate to handle some of the popular idols quite roughly, for which he was decried as an iconoclast and a heretic. Many of his opinions seemed, indeed, bold and paradoxical; but in the forty years which have elapsed since they were expressed, time has justified them in almost every detail. He attacked the aria as being merely "a means for the singer to display the agility of his vocal cords,"[1] at the expense of drama and music, of librettist and composer, — and does not the whole world now agree with him? Have not the "prima-donna operas," with their insipid

[1] In the *Art-Work of the Future* he inveighs against the aria as "a disgusting parody of folksong, . . . which, in defiance of all naturalness, and dissolved from all human feeling and verbal, poetic connection, tickles the ears of our idiotic operatic audiences." Strong language, this, but think of the countless provocations to formulate such language he must have had in his career as conductor of the numerous vulgar prima-donna operas then current.

and vulgar florid arias, fled to South America as their last refuge? Have not the Italian, French, and German composers ceased to write such operas for the especial benefit of singers, because there is no longer any demand for them?

Again, does any one deny to-day that these florid operas were an artificial, hothouse product for fashionable entertainment? It was natural that Italy, "*the only large civilized country in Europe in which the drama has never risen to any importance,*" should have been the birthplace of such a hybrid monstrosity as the opera, with its female Romeos, fortissimo conspirators' choruses, and constant prevalence of *dance*-rhythms, even in serious and *tragic* situations — the opera, in which music is associated with poetry without being amalgamated with it. But if Italian audiences are to this day so indifferent to the drama that they have been known to "encore" Lohengrin's entry on the swan boat, Italian composers, at any rate, have learned a lesson from Wagner. They no longer convert opera into a mere "variety show," with singers and dancers as soloists, at the expense of all dramatic propriety. Verdi himself has, in his old days, changed his attitude so much that Hans von Bülow was justified in calling him the Italian Wagner; Boito has followed the same example, and as for the younger composers of Italy, they have even begun, like Wagner, to discard the very name of "opera," using, instead, such terms as "drama," or "lyric comedy," to emphasize the new spirit.

Wagner acknowledges, and clearly points out in this essay, all that his predecessors had contributed toward the gradual transformation of the prima-donna opera into

the music-drama. Gluck's famous reform consisted in this, that he adopted, consciously, and as a matter of principle, the doctrine that operatic melody should correspond in expression with the sense of the words wedded to it. This produced a change in the relative position of the operatic factors: the singer is no longer a despot, to whose vanity everything must be sacrificed, but he becomes the interpreter of the *composer's* intentions. But that is as far as Gluck went; and those critics who have asserted that he practically anticipated Wagner in all his innovations forgot (or, more probably, did not know) that, to use Wagner's own words, "in Gluck's opera, aria, recitative, and ballet, each complete in itself, stand as unconnected side by side, as they did before him, and still do, almost always, to the present day" (1850). In other words, there is as yet no real amalgamation of music and drama, no form organically connecting each part of the opera with every other.

If Gluck insisted on the claims of the composer as against the singer, he did not, on the other hand, alter the relations of poet and composer. Such a thing as allowing *the drama to condition the form of music* never occurred to him any more than it did to his predecessors or followers. Progress was made after him, simply in enlarging or broadening the old operatic forms (Cherubini, Méhul, Spontini); and in France, especially, by paying more attention to the libretto. In Germany Mozart carried on Gluck's efforts to make the music correspond emotionally with the words. Read how Wagner expresses his "contempt" for Mozart: "This glorious composer, by simply following his instincts, discovered the power of music to attain truthfulness of dramatic

expression by an endless variety of means, in a much greater degree than Gluck and all his followers." So true was his musical instinct, that the value of his music is always determined by the excellence of its poetic substratum. "O how I love and worship Mozart," he exclaims, "because it was *not* possible for him to write as good music for *Titus* as for *Don Juan*, for *Cosi fan Tutte* as for *Figaro:* how shamefully that would have dishonored music!" Had Mozart been more careful in the choice of librettos, had he met the right poet, it would have been he, the most absolute of all composers, who would have solved the operatic problem for us long ago, by helping to create the truest, most beautiful, and perfect drama. But as he accepted, almost without choice, anything that was placed in his hands, the beauty and value of his music lies in individual points and traits; and although his best music is operatic, he did not abandon the old, worn-out operatic forms, and therefore did not help to solve the *formal* problem of the music-drama.

After Mozart, Italy once more came to the front with an epoch in which absolute melody (tune) ran riot, at the expense of every other element of music, and to the total eclipse of the drama. This tendency culminated in Rossini, whose florid tunes Wagner happily compares to the chemical perfumes which fashionable people accept as the equivalent of the natural fragrance of wild flowers (folksongs). For singers, players, and librettists, he made everything as easy and as *effective* as possible; and for the audiences he wrote just what the fashion of the moment called for. Hence he was the idol of singers, players, and audiences.

He showed, in his *William Tell*, that he was capable

of much better things than he had done almost all his life; but he deliberately sacrificed his artistic conscience, his genius, to the desire for immediate popularity. To reach such a goal, his method was no doubt the right one; for many years his operas almost monopolized the European theatres: indeed, it is on record that one year, in Vienna, the whole operatic season was devoted to Rossini. Donizetti followed his method, with similar results; his principal aim, like Rossini's, was to tickle the ears of a frivolous public with vocal frippery. And what has Time, that inexorable judge in æsthetic matters, said about this method? To-day, of Rossini's forty operas, only two or three are sung, at long intervals; and the same is true of Donizetti's sixty operas. Their vocal fashion has "gone out," like crinolines and farthingales, although only eighty and sixty years respectively have elapsed since these two composers produced their first successful operas.[1] Compare this with the method and the fate of Wagner.

[1] Here is some food for thought: When, a few days before the hundredth anniversary of Rossini's birth (Feb. 29, 1892), a call was issued in the New York papers for a meeting of his admirers, to arrange for a fitting celebration of this great event, *three persons*, carefully counted, came, beside the journalist, Mr. P. G. Hubert, who chronicled this fact. Mr. Damrosch did, indeed, conduct the *Stabat Mater*, but the Italian Opera at the Metropolitan Opera House took no notice of the event whatever. Mr. Seidl celebrated it with a — Wagner concert! In London, too, the Rossini centenary passed without any celebration except the performance of a few of his overtures at a Crystal Palace concert. The London *World's* critic justly remarked on this occasion: "We are apt to wonder nowadays why the public should have been so impressed at first by the apparent originality, dramatic genius, depth, and daring of Meyerbeer as to be mystified and scandalized when Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Wagner treated him with no more respect than if he had been an old clo' man from Houndsditch. But the explanation is very simple. We compare Meyerbeer with Wagner; amateurs of 1840 compared him with Rossini, and that made all the difference."

Never again, after the composition of *Rienzi*, did he for a moment consider what effect his music would have on the public; not once did he stoop to conquer audiences with cheap vocal or instrumental tricks; he wrote for himself, and for an ideal audience of Liszts. And what has been the result? The result has been that the public, to whose vitiated taste he refused to stoop, has risen up to his level. Although his first success came but thirty years later than Rossini's, but ten years later than Donizetti's, not *one* of *his* eleven operas has lost its vitality; they are all, with the exception of *Rienzi*, becoming more alive, more frequently performed, to the extent of about a thousand evenings, in German cities alone, every year. The lesson should not be lost on future composers. It may pay to supply the world with fashionable frippery; but the glory is transient, the reaction disastrous and humiliating.

To return to Wagner's argument. The branch of the opera represented by Rossini — the branch which makes its essence to consist in bare melody, and nothing but melody — came to an end with that composer. But there was another branch — the romantic — which began with Weber and led to nobler results, although it also failed to solve the problem of the true relation between poet and composer. Weber, displeased with the artificial flowers and perfumes of Rossini, made an effort to transplant the wild flower of folksong itself to the theatre. He succeeded in part, — for Weber was a great and noble artist, — yet the theatric atmosphere was not the proper soil for these wild flowers. Weber's example, however, was eagerly followed by other composers, who now began to hunt for wild flowers in all possible countries. Local

color became the fashion, and thus arose the national and historic schools of opera. Auber wrote his Neapolitan *Masaniello.* Rossini himself, feeling that the old school was "played out," followed with the Swiss *William Tell;* and all parts of the world were now searched for something novel and piquant to adorn operas with. The climax of this tendency is reached in Meyerbeer, the Jew, who gathered his wares in all countries, and brought them to market in Paris, where they created an enormous sensation. "Thus Meyerbeer composed operas in Italy *à la* Rossini only till the wind changed in Paris, and Auber and Rossini, with *Masaniello* and *Tell,* blew up the new wind to a storm. . . . His shrill cry suddenly made Auber and Rossini inaudible: the wicked *Robert the Devil* took them all."

The argument concludes with a severe criticism of Meyerbeer, the secret of whose operatic music Wagner declares to be effect, or, more precisely, "effect without a cause." Everything that can possibly tickle the ears or please the sight of the spectators is dragged in by the hair, whether there is any justification for it in the drama or not; as a striking instance of which he cites the sunrise in the *Prophète,* which is not a dramatic but a purely *mechanical* effect.

A COMMUNICATION TO MY FRIENDS

The historic sketch of the Opera, in *Oper und Drama,* comes to a somewhat abrupt end. We know from a letter to Uhlig (Oct. 22, 1850) that Wagner intended at first to bring the sketch up to date by passing therein judgment on his own operas. He reserved this task, however, for his *Communication to My Friends,* which

also belongs to this literary period (1851). It is a paper of 131 pages, with many autobiographic details, which have been used in their proper place in the preceding chapters. The self-criticisms on his operas will be more conveniently considered in the chapter on "Leading Motives," so that only a few general remarks remain to be made here. At first there was some trouble with the publishers, who wanted some sentences of the *Communication* omitted. The author was willing enough, "if the fools would only send me what I am to alter"; for, as he states, "to people of that kind, in constant fear of the censorship, it is mere secondary matters, single expressions, and strong figures of speech, that give offence."[1] The *Communication* was originally published as a preface to the three opera-poems *Dutchman, Tannhäuser,* and *Lohengrin;* and one of its claims to historic notice is that in it the first public announcement is made of his plan for a Nibelung Festival.

After completing the *Communication* he wrote to Fischer that he was going to a neighboring hydropathic establishment: "there will I wash out my body, as now by my literary work I have washed clean my intellect." He needed a rest, for his brain was tired, and dyspepsia troubled him. Prose literary work seems to have exhausted him much more than musical and poetic composition (doubtless because it gave him less pleasure), and at a later date he implored Uhlig: "You must not discuss theory with me any more; it drives me clean crazy to have to do with such matters. The nerves of my brain!

[1] Wagner's copy was usually the better for such "editing"; for he was apt to write "Carlylese" in moments of irritation, and to regret it afterwards. Even his essay on Liszt's Symphonic Poems was "edited" by Liszt himself.

— there's the bother! I have cruelly taxed them; it is possible I may yet one day go mad!"

WAGNER'S OPINIONS OF OTHER COMPOSERS

The enemies of Wagner, in their fanatic eagerness to damage his reputation and diminish his popularity, found one of the most effective weapons in the continually repeated assertion that he despised and attacked all the classical masters who preceded him. This accusation was made, not ten times, but ten thousand times. He himself refers to it in a letter[1] to Dr. L. Pohl, whom he thanks for having dedicated to him an edition of Beethoven's letters (1865).

"What you did in dedicating this book to me, you must know: you must know that you thereby offend all those who continue with the utmost persistence in the attempt to make the public believe that I despise our musical classics. For what reason they wish to keep up this silly belief must also be known to you. I assume, therefore, that your dedication amounts to a definite declaration; I thank you for it cordially."

These falsehoods about Wagner's opinions were put into circulation soon after the appearance of his theoretical essays, the critics vying with one another in their eagerness to follow the example of Fétis, whom Wagner accuses (1852) of misquoting his opinions in the most contemptible way and basing thereon a "complete caricature" of himself, for the edification of the French public. "What an ass" is his comment on this proceeding. But Fétis hardly deserved this epithet; he was too sly and malicious to be called an ass; and so were the

[1] Kürschner's *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886, p. 8.

other critics, who found an easy way to combat Wagner in dishonestly quoting detached sentences from his critical writings as proof that he "disparaged" the great masters. There was no lack of opportunity for such a proceeding, for Wagner differed from most musicians and "critics" in really being a *critic:* he did not follow the fashion cultivated by most professionals and amateurs, of finding nothing but perfection in one composer (especially after his death) and nothing but imperfection in another; but, while cordially praising each master for what was great in him, he also put his finger on the weak spots, sometimes in mild, at other times in sarcastic or violent, terms, according to his mood or provocation.

Italian Composers. — Enough has been said in preceding chapters to convince the reader that no musician has ever spoken more cordially, more enthusiastically, of the great masters than Wagner, and that he proved his devotion not only by words but by conscientious performances of their works during his conductorship at the Royal Opera in Dresden. Many equally convincing facts will be given in later chapters; but it is worth while to tarry here a moment by way of throwing some light on the literary morality of the musical critics who were Wagner's antagonists. In the first place, it need not be stated that the question of nationality never for a moment entered into Wagner's estimate of other composers. If he found fault with Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti (regarding Verdi he is silent), it was not because they were Italians, but because they had degraded the opera, in his opinion, into a circus ring for the exhibition of vocal acrobatics. The nationality of Palestrina did not

prevent him from worshipping his creations and pronouncing them "incomparable masterworks."

"With the appearance of opera in Italy," he says, "begins the decline of Italian music; an assertion which will meet with the approval of those who have had opportunity to realize the sublimity, the wealth, and the profound expressiveness of Italian church music of former centuries, and who, after hearing, *e.g.*, the *Stabat Mater* of Palestrina, will not possibly be able to sustain the opinion that Italian opera is a legitimate daughter of this wonderful mother." [1]

It must always be borne in mind that if Wagner condemned the composers of Italian opera, it was not their musical gifts that he questioned, but their misuse of them. He frankly acknowledged the beauty of their melodies, — or, rather, the prettiness of their tunes, — but insisted that they were out of place in a music-drama; a point on which the whole musical world has now come to agree with him. If he had no liking for Donizetti in general, he nevertheless wrote (1841) regarding *La Favorita:* "In this music of Donizetti we find, besides the acknowledged merits of the Italian school, that superior refinement and dignity which we miss in the numberless other operas of this inexhaustible maestro." If he found the score of Bellini's *Romeo and Juliet* "shallow and inane," he nevertheless wrote: "Since I learned of the impression made on Bellini late in his life by Beetho-

[1] It is interesting to compare with this the opinion of Verdi, as expressed in a letter to Hans von Bülow (1892): "Happy indeed are you in being able to call yourselves the sons of Johann Sebastian Bach. As for ourselves, we also, who are the sons of Palestrina, have had once a grand school which was truly our own. Nowadays it has become degenerate, and threatens to come to grief altogether. Ah, if we could only begin over again!"

ven's music, of which he had never heard any before his arrival in Paris, I have taken occasion to observe the qualities of Italian art-lovers from this point of view, and gained therefrom the most favorable opinion of their leading trait; namely, an open and delicate artistic receptivity in every direction." If he found fault with Rossini on account of his artistic insincerity and frivolity, he nevertheless noted the agreeable impression made on him by the *Barber of Seville* when he heard a *correct* performance of it at a suburban theatre in Turin. And he even offers this apology for Rossini's musical sins (1860): "What detracts from his value and dignity would have to be charged not to his endowments or artistic conscience, but solely to his public and his environment, which made it specially difficult for him to rise above his time, and thereby participate in the greatness of the true heroes of art."

French Composers. — For French opera Wagner naturally had much more appreciation than for Italian opera, because the French composers paid more attention to the drama and never went so far in cultivating the instrumental (florid) style of vocalism as the Italians did. One of the oddest episodes of his life was his attempt, in 1841, to do missionary work for Auber in *Paris*. He wrote an article, in the course of which he dwelt on the superiority of Auber's *Masaniello* and other French operas to those of the Italian invaders, including Rossini. When the article appeared (*Gazette Musicale*), he found that this passage had been omitted. On complaining to the editor (Ed. Monnaie, who was also inspector of all the royal theatres in France), he received the reply that it was impossible to permit the appearance of a passage in

which Rossini was found fault with in favor of Auber. It would have been very funny if the article had appeared anonymously, with the omitted passage, and its author accused of chauvinism. Wagner as a French chauvinist! The anecdote has its lesson, for it shows how superior a great genius like Wagner is to "patriotic" considerations. He simply preferred Auber to Rossini because he considered him a greater composer, and it aroused his indignation to see a great native genius ignored in favor of a less gifted foreigner.

He had not met Auber at this time, but his admiration for *Masaniello* was unbounded, and he pronounced it "a national work such as any country can produce only once," "an opera hot enough to scorch, and entertaining to the point of enchantment." This opera, indeed, had a considerable effect on the evolution of his own style, especially in two features — the conduct of the chorus, which here, almost for the first time in opera, is made to take a real, active part in the plot; and secondly the pantomimic music which Auber wrote to express the thoughts of the *dumb* heroine of his opera. In the absence of articulate speech and song, the orchestra alone can speak to the audience and explain the progress of the drama: this was a novel task, which excited the composer's creative fancy and urged him to do his best; and how much Wagner benefited by the brilliant result here attained, is shown in the numerous eloquent orchestral passages in his operas and music-dramas, which are not mere musical interludes, but pantomimic music, illustrating dumb action on the stage. There is even a grain of truth in the suggestion which has been made, that Wagner's later music-dramas are a higher evolution from pantomimic

music,— with speech restored and made melodious, — rather than a direct offspring of Italian opera.

As regards other French opera-composers whose works were known to Wagner, we cannot stop to consider them in detail. He has good words as well as censure for the two "French" composers of Italian descent, Spontini and Cherubini; but what he especially admired was the old school of French opéra comique — a form of art which he considers to have been more congenial to the French than the Grand Opéra.

"Whither has the grace of Méhul, Isouard, Boieldieu, and the *young* Auber fled before the vulgar quadrille-rhythms which to-day prevail in the Opéra Comique?

"Among the very few tone-poets related to Gluck and Mozart, whom we meet on the desolate ocean of operatic music as lonely guiding-stars, we must especially mention the masters of the French school of the beginning of this century. Independent, and sympathizing with the nation, these masters created the most excellent works that the history of a nation can show. In their operas is embodied the virtue and character of their nation."

Perhaps in no other passage is Wagner's habitual attitude toward other composers — a disposition to praise what is good and censure what is bad — more notably shown than in the following concerning one master of the French school: —

"In the summer of 1838, while I was engaged on the subject of *Rienzi*, I rehearsed with great devotion and enthusiasm Méhul's *Jacob and his Sons* with my Riga company. The peculiar, gnawing melancholy which habitually overpowered me when I conducted one of our ordinary operas was interrupted by an inexpressible, enthusiastic delight when, here and there, during the performance of nobler works, I became conscious of the incomparable effects that could be produced by musico-dramatic combinations on the

stage — effects of a depth, sincerity, and direct realistic vivacity such as no other art can produce. I felt quite elated and ennobled during the time that I was rehearsing Méhul's enchanting *Joseph* with my little opera company. That such impressions, which like flashes of lightning revealed to me unsuspected possibilities, continued to recur, accounted for the fact that I remained attached to the theatre no matter how violently, on the other hand, the typical spirit of our operatic performances evoked in me feelings of loathing."

German Composers. — For the greatest of all musical thinkers, Sebastian Bach, Wagner had an unbounded admiration, and, as Hans von Wolzogen relates in his *Erinnerungen an Richard Wagner* (p. 26), it was his music, beside Beethoven's, that chiefly engaged him in the last years of his life. The following are some of his utterances noted by Wolzogen: "Bach works only for himself, has no public in mind; only occasionally does it seem as if he were playing something for his wife: there we have a glimpse of the future which is already contained entirely in his works." "Without any modern sentiment, how warm, how healthy and natural, is his music, how full of feeling, what strange cries in it occasionally." On another occasion he expressed his delight over the Preludes, whose melodies "we cannot sing afterwards," adding, "such things are always new." Similar comments may be found in his literary essays in abundance.

His admiration for Gluck was perhaps more intellectual than emotional. In his remarks on this composer we nowhere find those ecstatic exclamations of delight with which he speaks so often of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Weber, and other German composers, as well as of some of the French school, as we have just seen. But everywhere he takes occasion to point out the instructive side

of Gluck's achievements, and his great services in restoring respect for the poetry in operatic composition and in bridling the extravagances of singers. The difference between Gluck and Mozart he indicates in these words: "Gluck endeavored consciously to speak correctly and intelligibly in declamatory recitative as well as in the melodious aria: Mozart *could not*, in consequence of his healthy instincts, speak otherwise than correctly." Neither of the two abolished the worn-out forms of Italian opera, but Mozart was the more spontaneous musician of the two. *Figaro* leads him to speak of "the incomparable dramatic talent of the glorious master." And of his masterwork: "Look at his *Don Juan!* Where else has music acquired such infinitely diverse individuality, and learned to characterize so surely and definitely, with the greatest variety and exuberance of means?" Of the *Magic Flute* Wagner says: "What celestial magic prevails in this work from the most popular melody to the most sublime hymn! What variety, what many-sidedness! The quintessence of all the noblest art blossoms appear here united and blended into one flower. What spontaneous and at the same time noble popularity in every melody, from the simplest to the most imposing! — In truth, genius has here made almost too great a giant-step; for in creating German opera, Mozart at the same time gave us the most perfect masterwork of its kind, which cannot possibly be surpassed, nay, whose *genre* cannot even be enlarged and developed."

Thus did Wagner "despise" Mozart. At the same time he is not blind to Mozart's shortcomings, and does not hesitate to lament the occasional triviality of his themes and superficiality of workmanship (caused by the

necessity of working rapidly to earn his bread); or to regret the empty cadences in Mozart's symphonies which often suggested to him the clatter of dishes in a dining-room, as if these pieces were still intended for table-music; or to deplore his carelessness in the choice of librettos. He also realized that, great as was Mozart's achievement, his promise was still greater: "We know how he went to meet his too early death with the bitter consciousness that he had just arrived at the point of showing the world what he could really do in music."

"Mozart died when he approached the secret (of music). Beethoven was the first to enter it." This is a later form of Wagner's early *credo* (written in the Paris period): "I believe in God, Mozart, and Beethoven." His worship of Beethoven was almost fanatical. I have related how, in his early youth, he knew Beethoven's quartets and sonatas by heart; how Heine, in his usual witty manner, declared that, in Paris, Wagner always had "friend of Beethoven" printed on his visiting-card; how he did missionary work for the symphonies, writing explanatory programmes for them, and proving to the astonished Dresdeners, by a remarkable performance, that the Ninth Symphony, previously neglected, was a masterwork. In Paris he had a plan of writing a Beethoven biography, and this was partially realized in 1870 by his seventy-three-page essay on Beethoven — a eulogistic tribute such as has never been paid by one musician to another. In view of all this it is hardly necessary to quote any of his remarks on Beethoven. A single one will suffice: —

"The great, much-promising heritage of the two masters, Haydn and Mozart, was made by Beethoven; he developed the

symphony to such a fascinating fulness of form, and filled this form with such an unheard-of wealth of enchanting melody, that we stand to-day before the Beethoven Symphony as before a boundary stone of an entirely new epoch in the history of art; for with them a phenomenon has appeared in the world, with which the art of no time and no nation has had anything to compare even remotely."

To get a good idea of this Beethoven worship, the reader should secure a copy of Glasenapp's *Wagner Encyclopœdie*, in which his scattered utterances regarding the various composers and other celebrities, as well as his remarks on his own operas, and on a multitude of miscellaneous subjects,[1] are collated alphabetically. There are, besides, remarks on his life, elaborate analyses of almost all his symphonies, especially the Ninth, observations on the sonatas, quartets, overtures, the opera *Fidelio*, etc. Yet, even in this case, Wagner's worship is not entirely blind. Though he idolizes Beethoven, he knows that nothing human is perfect. He notes that Beethoven's innovations are to be found much more in

[1] What an endless variety of topics are discussed in Wagner's literary works may be seen from the list of topics here collected under letter A: Aachen music-festival, Abel, Abt, Achilleus, Adam and Eve, Adolphe Adam, Ægypten, Æneas, Africa, Agamemnon, Agesilaos, Ahasver, Ahriman, Aischylos, Albericus, Alemannen, Alexander, Alexandrinism, Alkibiades, Alps, America, Amphion, Amsterdam, Anacker, Andalusia, Anschütz, Antäos, Antigone, Antique tragedy, Antillen, Antoninen, Apel, Apelles, Aphrodite, etc. Glasenapp has also compiled a *Wagner Lexicon*, in which that composer's utterances on abstract topics are brought together; such as absolute music, adagio, aria, anthem, civilization, drama, feeling, music, harmony, concerts, tone-color, instrumentation, love, literary dramas, opera, press, singing, philosophy, politics, morality, romance, genius, vegetarianism, vivisection, folksongs, slaves, sonata, music-schools, etc., etc. These two books will be found extremely useful by those who possess Wagner's works, as an index, and by those who do not possess them as containing the cream of his literary writings in short excerpts.

the sphere of rhythmic elaboration than in that of harmonic modulation. He found his instrumentation defective in some instances and shows how it should be improved. Beethoven, moreover, did not advance music by creating new forms; his greatness consisted in the astounding wealth of ideas with which he filled up the old forms, enlarged to their utmost capacity.

On reading Wagner's remarks on Beethoven, especially *à propos* of the Ninth Symphony, one might fancy that he considered himself a lineal descendant of that master. In truth, however, his points of resemblance to Beethoven are not nearly so remarkable as those which affiliate him with Weber, in whose works (especially *Euryanthe*) the root of Wagnerism must be sought. It is not surprising, therefore, that, next to the composer of *Fidelio*, no other musician should receive so much attention in Wagner's writings as Weber, except perhaps Mozart. The *Freischütz* was his first love, *Euryanthe* inspired *Lohengrin*, and if at one time, in his youth, he had foolishly censured this opera, he made up for his error subsequently by declaring it to be "worth more than all the opera seria of Italy, France, and Judæa." But he also notes Weber's faults, — his occasional concessions to the gallery; his misapplication of folksong to dramatic uses; the sacrifice here and there of word-accent to melody; the undramatic use of the chorus, etc. By quoting such censures apart from the context, Wagner's enemies could easily make it appear as if he "despised" a composer who really was one of the idols of his youth and manhood.

Modern Composers. — While thus defending Wagner against the misrepresentations of dishonest and menda-

cious critics, I would not by any means take the stand that he was always a safe and infallible critic. He judged almost everything from the standpoint of the music-drama, and whatever is one-sided and exaggerated in his verdicts must be placed to this account. Some of the greatest and most original composers are, moreover, not mentioned at all in his writings, or only incidentally, — for example, Chopin and Schubert, whom Rubinstein very properly classes among the five greatest masters the musical world has seen. Concerning Chopin, the only utterance of his I have been able to find, occurs in the report of a conversation with Mr. Dannreuther (Grove, IV. 369): "Mozart's music and Mozart's orchestra are a perfect match: an equally perfect balance exists between Palestrina's choir and Palestrina's counterpoint; and I find a similar correspondence between Chopin's piano and some of his Études and Préludes. — I do not care for the *Ladies' Chopin;* there is too much of the Parisian salon in that; but he has given us many things which are above the salon."

Nothing could be more surprising than Wagner's neglect of Schubert, to whom there are only one or two brief references in all his writings. Wolzogen, however, says that he was to his last days very fond of some of Schubert's songs, especially *Sei mir gegrüsst,* and often had them sung for him; while Dannreuther relates that Wagner remarked: "Schubert has produced model songs, but that is no reason for us to accept his pianoforte sonatas or his ensemble pieces as really solid work. . . . Schumann's enthusiasm for Schubert's trios and the like was a mystery to Mendelssohn. . . . Curiously enough, Liszt still likes to play Schubert. I cannot account for

it." Here Schumann and Liszt doubtless had a keener scent for genius than Wagner and Mendelssohn.

"It was Schubert's mission," says Liszt, "to do dramatic music an immense service *indirectly*. He applied and developed harmonic declamation in a still more effective manner than Gluck had done, elevated it to an energy and power that had previously been considered impossible in song, and adorned poetic masterpieces with its expression; and in this way he exerted on operatic style a perhaps greater influence than has hitherto been clearly understood." To which we may add a sentence from Sir George Grove's masterful remarks on Schubert and his songs:[1] "The music changes with the words as a landscape does when sun and cloud pass over it. And in this Schubert has anticipated Wagner, since the words to which he writes are as much the absolute basis of his songs as Wagner's librettos are of his operas."

That Wagner "despised the classical masters" is, as we have now seen, absurdly untrue. That he did not think very much of most of his contemporaries is, however, true; but nobody ever reproached him on this score, because all the hostile critics were conservatives, who themselves could not find much to praise in recent musical productions. He was annoyed at the way in which many modern composers stole his thunder. After all, the radical Wagner perhaps never uttered such a sweeping condemnation of all contemporary musicians as the conservative Rubinstein did in his recent work entitled *Die Musik und ihre Meister*, in which he declares that music came to an end with Chopin (pp. 112 and 152)! Brahms fares ill at Wagner's hands. There are several

[1] *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, III. 365.

uncomplimentary allusions to him in the essays, and he seems to have offended Wagner especially by writing symphonies after *he* had said that Beethoven had written the last great works that *could* be composed in that form. Yet it seems that there was no personal prejudice or ill-feeling between these two composers. Brahms was one of those who, after Wagner's death, sent a wreath for his coffin; and according to Wolzogen (*Erinnerungen*, p. 28) Wagner repeatedly had some of Brahms's pieces played for him with the express purpose of cultivating a taste for them. But he did not succeed: the "academic mask" over them repelled him. "I should be really delighted if I could once more meet with something great and true in our music," he would sigh; and in a more playful mood he exclaimed: "Yes, if Brahms sounded as well as Beethoven, he would be a great composer too!"

For another musician of the present Viennese school, Anton Bruckner, he had more sympathy, although one might have expected him to dislike that composer because, like many others of the present, he steals his thunder. Wagner's admiration for Robert Franz was referred to in a preceding chapter. That he could also admire a master in the humble sphere of dance music is shown by this sentence (VII. 393): "A single Strauss waltz surpasses in grace, refinement, and real musical substance most of the products of foreign manufacture which we often import at such great cost."

The opinions on Liszt and Berlioz will be more opportunely presented in later chapters; while the Jewish composers, Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, must be considered in connection with an essay and a subject which

played a great rôle in Wagner's life, and to which we must now turn.

JUDAISM IN MUSIC

In the same year that *Art and Revolution, Art and Climate,* and *Wieland der Schmid* appeared, Wagner wrote an essay entitled *Judaism in Music* which was first printed in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* for Sept. 3 and 6, 1850. The first intimation we have of it is in a letter dated Aug. 24, 1850, printed in the Uhlig correspondence as "addressed to a mutual friend." Herein Wagner expresses doubts whether Editor Brendel will have the courage of printing such an article; is very anxious to have it appear in one number, or at most in two; and if that is impossible, he wants it to be printed as an extra supplement at his own expense.[1] In case Brendel refused it, it was to come out as a pamphlet. The article is signed with the pseudonym "R. Freigedank" (Free Thought), and he adds concerning it these significant lines (in which, as in one or two places later on, I have taken the liberty to italicize a sentence): —

"That all the world will guess I have written the article does not matter; yet by an assumed name I avoid useless scandal, which would inevitably occur if I put my own name as signature. If the Jews should happen unfortunately to treat it as a personal matter, they would come very badly off; for I am not in the least afraid, even if M. [Meyerbeer] should get me upbraided with his *former favors*, which, in such a case, *I should expose in their true light.* But, as I said, I do not wish to bring about a scandal."

[1] His usual recklessness where the issuing of his own works is concerned; for he had no money, and only a few weeks later writes, after hearing that Brendel has accepted the article: "Will he pay me a fee for *Das Judenthum?* Forgive me this Jewish question, but it is the very fault of the Jews that I have to think of every farthing profit."

He begins his essay by stating that in a recent article printed in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (written by Uhlig), a reference was made to a "Hebrew taste in art," and this leads to a discussion of the reasons why there exists among the people an inner aversion to the Jews. The Jew can no longer complain of persecution (in Germany): he has had his emancipation, religious and political, and now "it is *we*, rather, who have to fight the Jews for our emancipation. In the present condition of affairs the Jew is already more than emancipated: he rules, and will rule, as long as money remains the power before which all our doings and efforts must confess their impotence." Art as well as life has passed under the control of the Jews, and this is what principally provokes Wagner, and leads him to repeat the question why the Jews are disliked in life, and why we ought to dislike their art and seek to become emancipated from it.

In the first place, he asserts, the Hebrews are not great artists by nature. In none of the arts have they produced creators of the first rank. They have no national art: the fragments of old Hebrew music preserved in synagogues are a mere caricature, and they show by their noisy conduct during their presentation that they have no respect for them. They have not even a common tongue, for Hebrew is even to them only a dead language. And here we come upon the weak point of the Semitic mind. The Jews have no country, no language, no home. They are to be found everywhere, but always as strangers. They adopt the language of the country they live in, but never speak it as the natives do: their idiom remains as foreign as their physiognomy. Now it is well known that no one has ever been able to be a poet

in a language which is not his idiomatically. How then could we expect the Jews to be great artists? Having no country of their own, and no true sympathy with their adopted country, how could they help in the creation of a national art? How can we expect one who cannot even speak idiomatically to express passion correctly and touchingly?

And yet, he continues, "the Jew, who by himself is incapable of making an artistic impression on us, either by his appearance, or his language, or, least of all, by his song, has nevertheless succeeded in becoming arbiter of public taste in music, the most widely cultivated of modern arts," and the very language of passion. How are we to account for this mystery? Will the theory of the music-drama explain this too? No doubt whatever. The music-drama, with Wagner, explains everything in this world, if not beyond. The Jews have been able to succeed in music because music has become a degenerate art. That is the whole secret. And why is music a degenerated art? Because, with Beethoven it reached the limit of what it could achieve as a separate art; thereafter further progress was only possible in the music-drama. But the misguided composers persisted in writing music for music's sake alone, and this paved the way for the Jews. After Beethoven, Wagner insists, with ludicrous exaggeration, music, as a separate art, is no longer a living organism, but only such multiple life as we see in a corpse devoured by worms. In such a condition of affairs anything is acceptable; accordingly Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer appear on the scene: —

"Mendelssohn has shown us that a Jew can have the highest specific talent, possess the most refined and varied culture, the

most exalted and delicate sense of honor, and yet be unable, with all those qualities, to make on us even once such soul-stirring impressions as we expect of art, knowing that it is capable of them, because we have often experienced such impressions, whenever a true hero of our art merely opened his mouth, as it were, to address us."

Mendelssohn's art, he continues, does not succeed in reproducing true passion; it merely pleases our ears by its smooth, delicate figurations, as a kaleidoscope pleases our eyes. It lacks unity of style, is unidiomatic, like Jewish speech, borrows from heterogeneous sources, from Bach to Beethoven, who have no more in common than an Egyptian sphynx and a Greek statue; hence it is not the highest art; and least of all can it be regarded as a further evolution of music, beyond Beethoven, as some critics would have us believe.

But Mendelssohn, he continues, has moments when he is really characteristic and true in feeling; the outcome, perhaps, of an occasional consciousness of the tragedy of his Semitic position. At such times he inspires sympathy, which no other Jewish composer does in a similar degree. Meyerbeer is a composer whose function was not so much to corrupt popular taste, as to take advantage of a taste already corrupted for his benefit. His mission is to drive away *ennui*, and for his purpose he resorts to everything that is piquant and tickles an audience, going from trivialities to volcanic outburst of feeling, and gathering his wares and styles from all parts of the world.

Such, in brief, is the substance of Wagner's notorious little essay. There is no doubt some truth in all his points, and about an equal amount of error: certainly everything is exaggerated, and the inevitable introduc-

tion (between the lines) of the monopolistic theory of the music-drama as the only salvation for music gives it a touch of the ludicrous. That the fanatical omnipresence of this idea should have led him implicitly to compare not only Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, but all composers since Beethoven, to worms infesting the corpse of absolute music, is as deplorable and farcical as his assertion that the Jews have produced no really great artists is absurd. True, they have given the world none of the very highest rank — no Shakespeare, Bach, Phidias, or Titian; but in the second rank they have contributed more than their share, in proportion to their numbers. To mention only the one to whom Wagner also alludes: Heine is not only the greatest lyric poet who has used the German language, but he writes both in prose and verse more artistically and *idiomatically* (except where idiomatic is equivalent to clumsy and inelegant, as it often is in German) than any other native writer except Goethe and Schopenhauer.

That the prejudice against the Jews, of which Wagner speaks, existed, and still exists, is, of course, undeniable. Only a year or two ago, one of the leading Jewish periodicals of New York, the *American Hebrew*, devoted a special issue to a discussion of the reasons for this prejudice, to which scores of well-known writers contributed, by editorial invitation. Mr. Carl Schurz pertinently gave as one reason that whenever a Jew behaves vulgarly he is specially noted as "a Jew," whereas whenever a Christian misbehaves in public he is simply referred to as a vulgar person, and not as "a Christian."

Where did Wagner first get his prejudice against Jews? In his childhood, at a time when impressions received

are apt to make an indelible, life-long impression. He was born at 88 Brühl, the Jewish quarter of Leipzig, to which he often referred as "Jerusalem":—

"The Polish Jews of that quarter," says Praeger, "traded principally in furs, from the cheapest fur-lined *Schlafrock* to the finest and most costly furs used by royalty. Their strange appearance, with their all-covering gabardine, high boots, and large fur caps, worn over long curls, their enormous beards, struck Wagner, as it did every one, and does still, as something very unpleasant and disagreeable. Their peculiarly strange pronunciation of the German language, their extravagantly wild gesticulations when speaking, seemed to his æsthetic mind like the repulsive movements of a galvanized corpse; . . . crying babes were speedily silenced by the threat 'The Polish Jew is coming!' . . . Strange to say, Wagner had imbibed some intuitive dislike to the Egyptian type of Hebrew, and never entirely overcame that feeling. No amount of reasoning could obliterate it at any period of his life, although he counted among his most devoted friends and admirers a great many of the oppressed race."

The irony of fate ordained, moreover, that Wagner was to be indebted to the Jewish race for no less an experience than his first love. Although he has made love as much the ruling passion in his dramas as most poets, there are few love affairs to record in his life, the chief reason perhaps being that he married at the early age of twenty-three. Some years before this, when he was still in Leipzig, he had met a lovely young Jewess, a friend of his sister Louisa, named Leah David, a black-eyed beauty of the true Oriental type. It was a case of love at first sight, and Richard was happy to be allowed to visit her at her house, fondle her dog, and play on her piano. One evening he was disgusted to find a cousin of his love, a young Dutchman, in the par-

lor. He proved to be a clever pianist, whose brilliant execution won him applause and flattery. This evoked the jealous anger of Wagner, who criticised his playing as being deficient in expression. Being challenged to do better, he seated himself at the piano; but as he had never mastered the technique of that instrument, the result was a failure, and was received with a titter. The rest of the story may be told in the words of Praeger, who had it from Richard himself: —

"Wagner lost his temper. Stung in his tenderest feelings before the Hebrew maiden, with the headlong impetuosity of an unthinking youth, he replied in such violent, rude language, that a dead silence fell upon the guests. Then Wagner rushed out of the room, sought his cap, took leave of Iago, and vowed vengeance. He waited two days, upon which, having received no communication, he returned to the scene of the quarrel. To his indignation, he was refused admittance. The next morning he received a note in the handwriting of the young Jewess. He opened it feverishly. It was as a death blow. Fräulein Leah was shortly going to be married to the hated young Dutchman, Herr Meyers, and henceforth she and Richard were to be strangers. 'It was my first love-sorrow, and I thought I should never forget it, but after all,' said Wagner, with his wonted audacity, 'I think I cared more for the dog than for the Jewess.'"

It would of course be absurd to suppose that this disappointment had anything to do with his later anti-Semitic sentiments. But the early impressions in "Jerusalem," and the use of Polish Jews as bugaboos in his childhood, doubtless continued to color his thoughts and to account partly for the fact that uncomplimentary references to the Jews continue to appear in his writings up to the last years of his life. But the motives which prompted the essay on *Judaism* in 1850 were purely

musical. It has been often asserted that they were personal — that he was jealous of the success of Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, and therefore abused them in the guise of a general attack on Hebrew art and character. But this is an unjust criticism. No doubt there was a personal element in Wagner's wrath,— no artist could possibly feel indifferent to the excessive popularity of his rivals, whom he knew, in his innermost consciousness, to be his inferiors, while his own works were ignored or abused, and his daily bread as well as his artistic ideals were involved in the question; — but there were other and nobler motives which prompted his misguided action — patriotic and artistic motives. It made his heart bleed to see how two exotic Jewish composers, not of the first rank, were almost monopolizing concert-halls and opera-houses, to the exclusion of the German classical masters; and it caused his soul the deepest anguish to see how his own works, more inspired, written on a higher level, and purely German, were neglected by his countrymen. Can we blame him for having taken up the cudgel in behalf of German classical art and his own music-drama? We all know *now* that Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer were esteemed beyond their merits at that time; that their unparalleled popularity was partly a fad, partly a delusion, partly the result of superficial taste. And shall we blame Wagner, and call him an egotist, because, with the superior insight and foresight of genius, he knew all this forty years ago, and had the courage to say it, regardless of consequences?

What these consequences were, we must now consider. In the first place, Editor Brendel, who published the article on *Judaism* in his *Neue Zeitschrift*, came near having

his head chopped off for this bold act. He was professor of musical history in the conservatory of Leipzig, at that time Germany's leading music school, and entirely under the control of Mendelssohn's followers. Naturally an attack on the music of their chief created a great commotion among the professors of that institution, including Joachim, David, Becker, Böhme, Plaidy, Rietz, Klengel, Wenzel, Hauptmann, and Moscheles. A document drawn up by Rietz (the same who subsequently curtailed and maltreated the *Lohengrin* score so unmercifully) was signed by these professors, asking the immediate dismissal of Editor Brendel from his professorial chair. The conservatory directors refused to comply with this request, and Brendel retained his post. The secret of the authorship of the objectionable article also appears to have been maintained for some time; rumor, however, connected Wagner's name with it, and six months later (April 9, 1851) Liszt writes to him: "Can you answer me, under the seal of absolute secrecy, the question: was the famous article on *Judaism in Music* in Brendel's paper written by you?" To which Wagner replies promptly: —

"Why do you ask me in regard to Judaism? You must certainly know that I wrote it: why this question? I used a pseudonym not from fear of consequences, but to avoid having the Jews make a purely personal matter of it. I had long harbored a repressed wrath against this Jew business, and this wrath is as necessary to my nature as gall is to blood. One occasion came on which their accursed scribbling provoked me excessively, and so at last I exploded: it appears to have struck in terribly, and I am glad of it, for such a shock was what I intended to give them. That they will remain masters of the situation all the same is as certain as the fact that not our princes but the bankers and Philistines are our rulers."

I have already stated that Wagner kept up a running fire of comment on the Jews, and their relations to music and society, in his writings up to his last days. But it was in 1869, more than eighteen years after his first article on this topic, that matters were brought to a climax by the publication of *Judaism in Music* in pamphlet form, together with a new and more elaborate essay entitled *Elucidations regarding Judaism in Music.* This interesting document is dated Lucern, New Year's, 1869, and appeared first in the form of an open letter to Madame Maria Muchanoff, *née* Countess Nesselrode, who had written to the composer for an explanation of the extraordinary circumstance that the press of that time, in France and England, as well as in Germany, was so savagely disposed towards all his artistic enterprises and works. Wagner's reply is ingenious and seems at first sight plausible. He traces the whole trouble back to his essay on *Judaism in Music.* He repeats that his reason for the adoption of a pseudonym was simply a desire to avoid having the article miss its intended effect by having it regarded merely as a personal attack on Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer by a jealous rival: —

"For this reason I had signed the article with the words 'Free Thought,' an obvious pseudonym. To Brendel I had communicated my intentions in this regard; he was courageous enough to let the storm descend on his own head instead of saving himself at once by letting it descend on mine. Soon thereafter there were signs and unmistakable evidence that I had been recognized as the author: I never met a question in regard to this with a denial. This was enough to cause a complete change in the tactics."

Up to this time, he continues, only coarse artillery had been brought to bear against the article, but now the

educated Jews took hold of the matter and managed it with their peculiar, practical shrewdness. The educated Jews dislike all discussions in which their nationality is involved and emphasized. Their object was, therefore, to get the offensive article out of the way as quickly as possible. But the insult to their race rankled fiercely in their breasts, and their vengeance took an *indirect* form: ignoring the real *casus belli*, — the essay, — they forthwith began to attack its author's other writings, especially his operas, systematically and persistently. The whole German press being practically in the hands of the Jews, the result was a formal conspiracy against a composer who was not only maliciously attacked, but actually found it impossible, on one occasion, to get his remarks on the Jew Offenbach into a newspaper. Even Liszt was made to suffer for his friendship with Wagner, who traces to the same essay on Judaism the reason why, up to 1869, it had been almost impossible to get a friendly notice of Liszt's compositions into a German paper. In Paris, the Meyerbeer faction saw to it that no favorable notice of Wagner or his friend could get into the press. In London, the press demolished him because he would not worship the English idol, Mendelssohn. In Vienna, a jurist of (concealed) Jewish descent, Dr. Hanslick, elaborated a system of æsthetics in which Mendelssohn is recognized as the heir of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven — the climax of the series, in fact, and a sort of corrector of the "aberrations" in the later Beethoven. This man, as critic of the leading Vienna paper, became the head of the opposition, declared Wagner's works utterly worthless, and set the fashion in this direction for German newspapers

in general. "Nothing more was talked about than my contempt for all great composers, my enmity to melody, and my horrible compositions — in short, the 'music of the future'; but that article on *Judaism in Music* was never again mentioned."

This "Elucidation" is, as I have said, ingenious, and some truth there is no doubt in it; yet I believe that Wagner was mistaken in attributing the opposition to his works entirely, or even largely, to the hostile feeling stirred up by his attacks on the Jews, especially by the first attack, which attracted but little attention at the time of its publication. The opposition to his works had various sources, prominent among which were the inability of conductors and singers to interpret them correctly, and the slowness of hearers (especially critics) in assimilating not only new music, but — what is much more difficult (and to some people impossible) — *music in a new form*. In regard to the *virulence* of the attacks on him, however, Wagner was partly right in his argument. He was attacked by the critics because he had criticised or attacked their favorites — especially Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn. But these composers were thus savagely defended and avenged because they were fashionable idols, and not because they were Jews; for among their fanatic worshippers there were more Christians than Jews. That this explanation is the correct one is, I think, proved by the fact that so many of Wagner's most ardent friends and patrons were and are Jews. His attacks on their race are generally condoned as a freak of genius.[1] But attacks on a favorite and fashionable

[1] Catulle Mendès tells an amusing story of a rich Jewish banker at Pesth who hated Wagner for his essay, but worshipped him as a com-

composer could not but be resented by Jews and Christians alike. Next to religious comment nothing inflames the passions so much as musical discussion. Now that the Mendelssohn-Meyerbeer cult has died out (and, in fact, given place to almost as undeserved neglect, as far, at least, as the nobler of the two, Mendelssohn, is concerned), Jews and Christians both are flocking to the Wagner standard. It is an incontestable fact that New York could not have enjoyed seven such brilliant and successful seasons of German opera as it did from 1884–1891, had it not been for the liberal patronage of the wealthy Jews of that city. In Berlin the leading Wagner organ has for many years been the Jewish *Boersen-Courier*. The originator of the Patronatsverein for defraying the expenses of the first Bayreuth festival was the enthusiastic Jewish Wagnerite and pianist, Carl Tausig; and among Wagner's other personal friends there were many Jews — men and women who were intelligent enough to see that his tirades were directed against certain disagreeable general traits of their nation, and therefore not applicable to individuals who were free from those traits. And this is a point on which too much emphasis cannot be laid. Again and again Wagner dwells on the fact that nothing could have been farther from his intentions than a desire to hurt any one's feelings. His great enthusiasm for his idea (to use his own words, V. 3) caused him to "forget all regard for personal considerations" — a characteristic of men of genius, by the way, which ordinary individuals, who are never guided by other than personal motives,

poser. By way of expressing his mixed feelings he had a statue of him in his parlor, with a laurel wreath on his head and a rope around his neck.

find it very difficult to comprehend. In a letter dated March 10, 1851, Wagner, apprehensive of the personal interpretation that might be given to his *Opera and Drama*, begs Uhlig to cancel certain sentences, adding: —

"It would be terrible if the book should come to be looked upon simply as an attack on Meyerbeer. I wish I could withdraw still much of this kind. When I read it, the mockery never sounds venomous; but if others read it, I may often seem to them an ill-tempered, sour-minded individual, and this I would not appear to be, even to my enemies."

It was *this* treatise — the first part of *Oper und Drama* — that was, in my opinion, responsible for the flood of hostile newspaper criticism that overwhelmed Wagner from this time on, and which he erroneously attributed to the *Judaism* essay. In *Oper und Drama* he "scored" not only Meyerbeer, but another popular idol of the hour, Rossini, and pointed out weaknesses in others still, who had (*since their death*) been considered exalted above criticism: *hinc illæ lacrymæ — that* was the cause of the row.

Meyerbeer. — Critics whose minds are too philistine to rise above personal considerations have accused Wagner innumerable times of "gross ingratitude" toward Meyerbeer, because, after receiving favors from him, he attacked his works. The charge is an old story in the record of human thought, and has been answered delightfully for all times in the words "Amicus Plato, Amicus Socrates, sed magis amica veritas." Dr. Hanslick is one of the critics just referred to. In his book *Musikalisches und Literarisches*, 1892, he puts the "ingratitude" objection in this form: —

"Hesitating, nervous individuals like Meyerbeer are usually very sensitive. The creator of the *Huguenots* felt every sting of

criticism acutely. Most of all was he hurt by the contemptuous verdict of Richard Wagner, whom he had protected and assisted in his days of need. The question of personal gratitude need not be considered here at all, and we may even admit that one may receive benefits from a friend and yet consider his works bad. But I believe that the consciousness of favors received should of its own accord impose restraint and measure in the public expression of censure on any not entirely hardened mind. All the more when it is not a question of defence, but an attack *provoked by no necessity*."

In spite of Dr. Hanslick's waiving the question of "personal gratitude," the personal aspect of this objection has never been so nakedly exposed as here. The substance of his argument is: "Meyerbeer did not attack Wagner *personally*, therefore it was mean for Wagner to attack him; there was no *necessity* for it." That there can be such a thing as an ideal, *artistic* necessity, springing from no personal grudge, but a desire to reform abuses, is a thing which a mind of Dr. Hanslick's calibre cannot grasp. If he could have grasped it, he would have seen that Wagner completely and most eloquently answered his objection more than forty years ago, in this passage from the preface to *Opera and Drama*: —

"I do not deny that I struggled long with myself, before I made up my mind to what I did, and the way in which I did it. Everything contained in this attack [on Meyerbeer] I have read over again calmly, considering every phrase, and weighing carefully if I should give it to the public, until I finally convinced myself that, in consideration of my extremely decided and incisive opinions on this important matter, I would merely show cowardice and an unworthy regard for possible consequences to myself, if I did not express myself just as I have done in regard to that most dazzling phenomenon in the modern operatic world. What I say about it is a point on which most honest artists have long ceased to entertain any doubt; but the thing that bears fruit is not concealed

wrath, but an open declaration and definite motivation of hostility; for that produces the necessary explosion which purifies the elements, separates the pure from the impure, and sifts what there is to sift. It was not my intention to create this enmity for its own sake, but I was *compelled* to create it, because, after expressing my views abstractly, I felt the necessity of giving them a particular application to individual cases; my aim is not merely to suggest truth, but also to make myself clearly understood. To make myself thus understood I was obliged to point a finger at the most illustrative phenomena in our art; but this finger I could not withdraw and put with the fist in my pocket as soon as I came upon the particular phenomenon which most clearly illustrates the error in art which we must combat, and which, the more brilliant it appears, dazzles all the more the eyes which must see with perfect clearness, if they are not to become blind altogether. Consequently, if I had observed a reticent regard for this one person, I could either not at all have undertaken this work, to which my convictions impelled me, or I would have been obliged to weaken its effect intentionally; for I would have had to consciously conceal the most evident and most significant points."

Wagner did not entirely condemn Meyerbeer. True, he says (V. 376): "Meyerbeer's music is characterized by such frightful hollowness, shallowness, and artistic emptiness, that we feel inclined to place his specific musical endowment — especially as compared with the majority of contemporary composers — on the zero line." But that this was not a sober criticism, but merely a momentary ebullition of artistic indignation, is shown *on the very next page* of *Oper und Drama*, where he pays this enthusiastic tribute to Meyerbeer's genius, pointing out how, in certain instances,

"he can readily find the richest, noblest, and most soul-stirring musical expression. I recall here especially some passages in the well-known scene of love and anguish in the fourth act of the *Hu-*

guenots, and above all, the wonderfully touching melody in G flat major, which, sprouting like a flower from a dramatic situation that makes every fibre of the human heart vibrate with a voluptuous thrill, is a passage to which few things in music, and only the most perfect, are comparable. I emphasize this point with the sincerest joy, and genuine enthusiasm,[1] because it shows," etc.

When Wagner says that "most honest artists have long ceased to entertain any doubt" regarding the vicious features of Meyerbeer's art which he exposes, he speaks the absolute truth: one of the most suggestive differences between Meyerbeer and Wagner is that *whereas Wagner's genius was recognized first by other men of genius, it was other men of genius who first condemned Meyerbeer.* After Meyerbeer had returned from Italy, where he had learned to copy the cheap tricks of Rossini, Weber, after conducting his latest opera, the product of this new schooling, at Dresden, wrote: —

"My heart bleeds when I see how a German artist, endowed with creative power of his own, degrades himself to the level of an imitator, merely for the sake of applause. Is it then so very difficult, I will not say to despise the applause of the moment, but at least not to make it one's highest aim?"

Rossini himself, as well as Spontini, disliked Meyerbeer, the former perhaps because Meyerbeer surpassed him in his own line, by not only picking up in Italy whatever was most likely to tickle audiences for a moment, but gathering his ear-ticklers also in German and French

[1] It is characteristic of the tactics and the literary ethics of Wagner's enemies that Dr. Hanslick, in the essay just referred to, cites Wagner's words about Meyerbeer's endowment being equal to zero, but preserves absolute silence regarding the modifying passage just quoted, thus giving his readers, as usual, a totally distorted view of Wagner's real opinions.

markets — Italian florid song, instrumental solos, German counterpoint (occasionally, for effect), French dances, and scenic titbits, etc., — making a musical variety show, or what Wagner wittily called a musical "Mosaic." The amiable Schumann abused Meyerbeer more venomously than ever Wagner did, and even Mendelssohn, a Jew himself, expressed his dislike of Meyerbeer's operas. Liszt, in speaking of some of Meyerbeer's cheap effects, uses the expression *gold-dust*, which admirably characterizes them. The public is gradually learning to distinguish between Meyerbeer's gilded wood and Wagner's solid gold, and statistics reveal the significant fact that everywhere Meyerbeer's popularity wanes in the same proportion as Wagner's grows.

The more we reflect on this whole question of Meyerbeer and Judaism, the more we become convinced that while Wagner cannot be acquitted of the charge of exaggeration, partial error, and imprudence, he only showed the true nobility of his artistic character by not allowing a feeling of "gratitude" to override his judgment and his love of art. Nor is this all: Wagner's indebtedness to Meyerbeer has been greatly overestimated. Although we have alluded to this matter in an earlier chapter, we must return to it here because it is of such great importance in forming a just estimate of Wagner's character. His own opinion was that Meyerbeer had not helped him on in his artistic career. He failed to do anything for him in Paris, although he was the most influential musician there; he commended *Rienzi* to the Dresden intendant, but it was not accepted till long thereafter, and even then chiefly owing to the intercession of Chorus-conductor Fischer, and the

famous tenor Tichatschek; while Berlin, where Meyerbeer's influence was as great as in Paris, was one of the last cities in Germany to encourage Wagner as an opera-composer. There is a passage in one of Wagner's letters to Liszt (No. 59) in which he says that he does not hate Meyerbeer, but feels a boundless aversion to him, and speaks of "the time when he still made a pretence of protecting me," and of "the intentional impotence of his kindness to me"; which letter I advise the reader to peruse here, as it is too long to quote.[1]

One more important point remains to be considered — important because it involves the question of Wagner's honesty. Dr. Hanslick in the article referred to above, tries, with his usual "method," to convey to his readers the impression that Wagner was dishonestly inconsistent in his treatment of Meyerbeer. He bases this accusation on a recently discovered manuscript of Wagner's, dated 1842, in which Meyerbeer is lauded to the skies as a true German, a genuine successor of Handel, Gluck, and Mozart, an artist with immaculate conscience, who beat the Italians on their own ground, and whose style rises to real classical dignity. Upon this Dr. Hanslick com-

[1] Compare with this what Wagner's friend Praeger says (p. 216): "I frankly admit, with an intimate acquaintance of Wagner's feelings regarding Meyerbeer, that he despised the 'mountebank,' hating cordially the thousand commercial incidents Meyerbeer associated with the production of his works. Schlesinger told me indeed of well-authenticated instances where Meyerbeer had gone so far as to conciliate the mistresses of critics to secure a favorable verdict." It is also well known that he asked the advice of the chief of the claque regarding the probable effectiveness of certain passages in his operas. With this compare the policy of Wagner, who was willing to wait *fifteen* years after *Lohengrin* before bringing out a new opera, rather than make the slightest concession to fashionable "taste" and "criticism" — and then judge for yourself whether he was not right in claiming that he was the "opposite" of Meyerbeer as an artist and a *man*.

ments: "We stand here before a riddle, and not a pleasant one." "The possessor of this precious autograph, Herr Leo Lipmannssohn in Berlin, has wisely had it printed before its sale at public auction, lest it might be secretly bought by a friend and destroyed unnoticed." The change from these early sentiments on Meyerbeer to the later severe opinions, Hanslick intimates, was caused by the fact that "Wagner wished to be considered not only the greatest but the *only* tone-poet of the time."

Now Dr. Hanslick is so thoroughly familiar with the facts of Wagner's life that he even knows and records the minute changes in his early essays when they were reprinted in later years. It is not likely therefore that he was ignorant of the facts here to be presented. It has been shown in preceding pages that Wagner's opinions on music — especially on operatic music — underwent a gradual change and evolution. In his first Paris period he still placed instrumental music above the opera (I. 193). In 1834 he wrote an article on *German Opera*, in which he denies that there is such a thing as German opera; abuses Weber; says the Germans do not know how to write for the voice, and that for genuinely spontaneous operatic music we must go to Bellini! In 1837 he wrote an article on Bellini,[1] in which he promulgated similar views. In the same year he wrote a letter to Meyerbeer in which he says that he was induced to devote himself to music about the age of eighteen: —

"A passionate adoration of Beethoven impelled me to this step — a devotion which gave my first productive efforts an extremely one-sided direction. In the meantime, and especially since I have entered practical life, my views on the present condition of music,

[1] See these articles in Kürschner's *Wagner Jahrbuch*, 1886, pp. 376–9, 381–2, 478.

especially dramatic music, have undergone a considerable change, and shall I deny that it was your works above all which indicated to me this new direction?"

That this statement was made in perfect sincerity (imitation is the sincerest form of flattery) is proved by the fact that in the following year (1838) he commenced the composition of *Rienzi*, which, by his own admission (VII. 159), is modelled after the grand opera of Meyerbeer, Auber, and Halévy. This opera was not completed till 1840, and its first performance was in 1842, the year in which was written (but not printed) the favorable notice on Meyerbeer concerning which Dr. Hanslick makes his contemptible insinuations. Wagner's articles *against* Meyerbeer were not written till seven years later; in 1842 he had some indirect reason to feel "grateful" to Meyerbeer, his model for *Rienzi*, his first success. In such a moment of grateful feeling he probably wrote that article; but the fact that he did not print it speaks for itself. His mind was then growing in a new direction with giant strides, and he soon, therefore, began to harbor doubts regarding the solidity of Meyerbeer's art, which in course of the next seven years grew into such a strong conviction in his mind. These are the simple facts of the case, fortified in each detail by documents and dates; and with these facts before him, I leave it to the reader to decide whether it is Wagner or his venomous critic who is disgraced by this early laudatory manuscript on Meyerbeer.[1] "We stand here before a riddle, and not a pleasant one."

[1] What did Meyerbeer think of Wagner? Dr. Hanslick (*l.c.*) states that in 1846 he put the question to Meyerbeer, who replied simply, "His operas find much *favor*," and immediately changed the subject. In a

Mendelssohn. — In the same year when this essay on Meyerbeer was written, Wagner one day entered the house of Mendelssohn, who was just trying over a new sonata with the distinguished violoncellist, Servais. Wagner stood in a corner for a while, and then departed without having said a word. "O that's an *Original* — but he will make the world talk of him," exclaimed Mendelssohn.[1] The world soon did talk about Wagner, more than Mendelssohn perhaps had expected. Mendelssohn, the pet child of fashion, could not brook a rival. "Personally he was very amiable; at social gatherings, however, he demanded, with noticeable vanity, that everything should centre in him, and he was in a bad humor if any one else attracted attention" (*Jahrbuch*, 1886, p. 76). In a letter to Schubring (1835) he complains that "there are so few musicians whom I could and would like to call friends; this often makes me sad." This self-diagnosis was correct. He did not care for any one of his really great contemporaries; his friends were his imitators and worshippers — second and third rate musicians. He sneered at Chopin (Chopinetto), detested Liszt and Berlioz (whom he calls "a perfect caricature without one spark of talent"), never had a kind word even for Schumann, who often wrote about *him* so appreciatively. Small wonder that he did not like Wagner; that he refused to produce his early symphony; that he

footnote to *Wagner Jugé en France* (p. 33) we read: "M. Blaze de Bury relates that *a single name had the privilege of exasperating Meyerbeer, that of R. Wagner:* 'he could not hear it pronounced without immediately experiencing a disagreeable sensation, which, besides, he did not give himself the trouble to conceal, — he who was usually so discerning, so clever in discovering with a microscope any one's qualities' (*Meyerbeer et son Temps*)."

[1] Kastner *Wagner-Katalog*, p. 14.

conducted the *Tannhäuser* overture as a "warning example," and consoled Wagner *à propos* of the *Dutchman* in Dresden, with the remark that he ought to be satisfied, since, after all, it hadn't been a "*complete* fiasco!"

Time has shown that Mendelssohn was a poor judge of musical genius, while Wagner's verdict on other composers has been borne out in almost every detail. He said that Mendelssohn had been able to gain such great popularity largely because the masters preceding him had so thoroughly developed the materials of music that it had been made easy for any one to talk agreeably in that language. To-day we all know that most of Mendelssohn's works are musical "small-talk," and that it was his pleasant way of saying nothing that made people think these nothings so "beautiful in form." Wagner censured him for his wrong way of conducting Beethoven and other composers: to-day the greatest conductors — Dr. Hans von Bülow, Hans Richter, Anton Seidl, Arthur Nikisch, etc. — conduct Beethoven *à la* Wagner. And so on. On the other hand, it must be distinctly remembered that Wagner did not entirely condemn Mendelssohn. He admitted, as we have seen, that he had "a specific musical endowment equalled by few other musicians before him." While condemning his *Antigone* music as undramatic and utterly incongruous to its subject ("c'est de la Berliner *Liedertafel*," Spontini said of it), he calls the *Hebrides* overture "one of the most beautiful pieces we possess" (X. 197). To Mr. Dannreuther he remarked[1] concerning this overture: —

"Wonderful imagination and delicate feeling are here presented with consummate art. Note the extraordinary beauty of the pas-

[1] Grove's *Dictionary*, IV. 369.

sage where the oboes rise above the other instruments with a plaintive wail, like sea-winds over the seas. *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* is also beautiful; and I am very fond of the first movement of the Scotch symphony. No one can blame a composer for using national melodies when he treats them so artistically as Mendelssohn has done in the Scherzo of this symphony. His second themes, his slow movements generally, where the human element comes in, are weaker. As regards the overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it must be taken into account that he wrote it at seventeen; and how finished the form is already!" etc.

Rubinstein. — There is another famous Jewish composer concerning whom it would have been interesting to have Wagner's opinion; but it is not on record, so far as I know, and it is doubtful if Wagner had opportunity to form a just estimate of Rubinstein's symphonies and operas. Rubinstein, on his part, has not failed to give the world his opinion of Wagner, which is contained in his little book *Die Musik und ihre Meister* (1891), pp. 95–104. He begins by stating that in 1845–6 he was at Mendelssohn's house one day and found the *Tannhäuser* score open on the piano. To the question what he thought of that opera, Mendelssohn replied: "A man who writes both the text and the music of his operas is at any rate not an ordinary man." Upon which Rubinstein comments, "Yes, not an ordinary man . . . highly interesting, very valuable, but beautiful or great, deep or high, in a specific musical sense, he is not." Whereupon he proceeds to make mincemeat of all his works (except *Lohengrin*, *Die Meistersinger*, and the *Faust* overture, which he likes) in very much the same style that the great Jahn brought to bear, half a century ago, on *Lohengrin!* All this time, according to Rubinstein, mankind has admitted Wagner's genius merely because

it has so often been reproached with having ignored contemporary men of genius that it was afraid to make the same mistake again, and so it idolized Wagner!!! Poor Rubinstein! The world has treated *him* so badly as a composer, that he can hardly be expected to have preserved his sense of humor if he ever had any. But the Russian lion is at least bold. In spite of Æschylus and the other Greek dramatists, he asserts that a myth can be "an interesting and poetic theatre-piece, but never a *drama*" (96)! Wagner's use of Leading Motives is "such a naïve proceeding that it produces a comic effect and can claim no serious meaning"! The exclusion of arias is a mistake, he continues. Even the orchestra is all wrong, because it diminishes the interest in the vocal part! An invisible orchestra is "simply unendurable"! A darkened auditorium benefits only the manager, whose gas bill it reduces! The persons in Wagner's dramas are *never dramatic* (p. 102). "His melody never characterizes the musical thought or person"! His orchestration is "deficient in economy and variety of shading"! And besides, Wagner isn't nearly as interesting as Berlioz, anyhow, because the latter appeared *at once* as an innovator, and did not *become* one, like Wagner!

If Wagner had lived to read these unintentionally comic lucubrations of Rubinstein, he would have doubtless smiled and pointed at them as an interesting and amusing confirmation of the views promulgated in his essay on *Judaism in Music*. And Rubinstein is as undramatic in his operas as in his opinions; which is the reason why all of his operas — full of delicious melody though they are — have failed to win a permanent success. Had he had genuine dramatic instincts, he

would have learned from Wagner, as Wagner learned from Weber and other great predecessors, and his fate would have been different. To have written as many operas as Wagner, to see all of Wagner's regularly on every repertory and none of his own on any (outside of Russia, where one or two have become popular), is enough to sour any man. But the public exhibition of this sour face, distorted by impotent, jealous rage, is a melancholy close to the career of a great artist; a musician whose compositions deserve very much more attention than his contemporaries have given them, and whose "Dramatic" and "Ocean" symphonies — like the works of Dvořák, Grieg, and Tchaikovsky — go far to disprove Wagner's absurd assertion that pure instrumental music had reached its highest possible development in Beethoven, and come to an end with him. Unfortunately for Rubinstein, his supremely silly "criticisms" on Wagner have injured himself a thousand times more than his intended victim; they have shown him to possess a petty, jealous character; and they have alienated from him the sympathy of many who had previously worked hard for the popularization of his music.

WELDING THE NIBELUNG'S RING

HOW THE POEM WAS WRITTEN

THE first three years following his flight from Dresden, Wagner devoted chiefly to the writing of the literary works considered in the preceding chapter, and a few minor essays, amid some interruptions which we shall narrate later on. Three more full years were to elapse before he began to compose again; but these last literary years were at any rate largely devoted to creative art-work instead of art-criticism; namely, to the conception and execution of the Nibelung poem, in its four parts.

The curious circumstance has long been known that while the music of *Rheingold*, *Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* was composed in the proper order here given, the poems were written in inverse order. The last-named drama was written first, under the name of *Siegfried's Death* and in a somewhat different shape; then came *Siegfried* (originally *Young Siegfried*, and differing in details from the later drama), followed by the *Walküre* and finally *Rheingold*. The details of this literary performance were not known till the appearance of the Correspondence with Liszt, and with Uhlig, Fischer, and Heine, in 1887–1888; and even from that it is not easy to unravel the tangle, since we read, for instance, under date of June 18, 1851: "I commenced *Young*

Siegfried on the 3d June, and I shall have finished it in a week"; and again in July: "I have just written the poem of *Young Siegfried*"; while more than a year later (November, 1852) we come across this: "I am now working at *Young Siegfried;* I shall soon have finished it. Then I attack *Siegfried's Death* — this will take me longer." The apparent inconsistency is explained by the fact that the last reference to *Young Siegfried* is to the revised and remodelled version of it. Concerning *Siegfried's Death* he adds: "I have two scenes in it to write afresh (the Norns and the scene of Brünnhilde with the Valkyries), and above all the close; besides these, everything needs most important revision. The whole will then be — out with it! I am impudent enough to say it — the greatest poem ever written!"

It is interesting to compare the changes he here refers to with the original *Siegfried's Death*, which, as the reader will remember, was written as early as 1848, immediately after *Lohengrin*.[1] Leaving that task to the reader himself (with the hint just quoted from Wagner's letter), let us now examine the motives which led him to abandon his plan of composing *Siegfried's Death*, and to evolve from it instead a complete Tetralogy, or cycle of four dramas.

Had it not been for the revolution in Dresden and Wagner's share in it, it is probable that *Lohengrin* would have been given there in due course of time, and that, with such a fine cast as was available there, and the composer himself to conduct, it would have proved a success. Encouraged by this, he would have at once

[1] The original *Siegfried's Tod* is printed in Vol. II., the revised *Götterdämmerung* in Vol VI., of the *Gesammelte Schriften*.

set to work and composed his *Siegfried's Death.* In that case we should have had no Tetralogy, and it is not likely that that drama would have compensated even for *Götterdämmerung* alone. After *Lohengrin* had been produced at last in Weimar, its exiled composer for a time thought seriously of setting *Siegfried's Death* to music and sending it to Liszt for the Weimar stage. In June, 1849, he wrote to him: "I shall at last devote my time to composing my last German poem, *Siegfried's Death;* in half a year I shall send you the complete opera." In September, 1850, he wrote to Uhlig: —

"Liszt informs me that there is some talk, should *Lohengrin* succeed, of commissioning me to compose my *Siegfried* for Weimar; for which purpose an honorarium would be paid to me in advance, sufficiently large to enable me to live undisturbed until the completion of the work. Thereupon I have answered that I would never have composed *Siegfried* as a castle in the air; but if *Lohengrin* turned out thoroughly satisfactory, I presumed that actors would thereby be trained for me at Weimar who, with proper zeal and earnestness, would be able to bring *Siegfried* to life in the best possible way. For the Weimar company I would therefore specially get the *Siegfried* music ready for performance. Already I have procured music-paper and a Dresden music-pen, but whether I can still compose, God only knows! Perhaps I can get into the way again."

A month before this he had written to Liszt that the *Siegfried* music was already haunting him in all his limbs (*spukt mir bereits in allen Gliedern*). About the same time he sent the poem to the publisher Wigand in Leipzig, who, however, refused to print it, and Uhlig kept the manuscript.

Thus matters stood before the first performance of *Lohengrin* at Weimar, which we have already described.

That performance made Wagner change his mind. No doubt, considering all the circumstances, it was a creditable performance; but no one need be told that *Lohengrin* cannot be put on the stage, *as Wagner intended it*, with an expenditure of only about $1500 for scenery, and with artists who, had they been first-class, would not have sung for a pittance in so small a town as Weimar. Bear this in mind, and you will understand what he meant when he wrote to Uhlig (Sept. 20, 1850): "I need not begin to assure you that I really *abandoned Lohengrin* when I permitted its production at Weimar."

The situation made him think; and the result of his meditations is hinted at in two extraordinary epistolary passages which show that he had the *germs of a sort of Bayreuth-Festival plan* in his mind twenty-six years before it was realized. It seems that it was Heine who received the first inkling of this plan in these mysterious lines, dated Sept. 14: "I am now thinking of writing the music to *Siegfried*. In order one day to be able to produce it properly, I am cherishing all sorts of bold and out-of-the-way plans, to the realization of which nothing further is necessary than that some old uncle or other should take it into his head to die." To Uhlig he wrote more seriously and explicitly, a week later: —

"I need not give you my further reasons when I declare that I should like to send *Siegfried* into the world in different fashion from that which would be possible to the good people there. With regard to this, I am busy with wishes and plans which at first look seem chimerical; yet these alone give me the heart to finish *Siegfried*. To realize the best, the most decisive, the most important work which, under the present circumstances, I can produce, — in short, the accomplishment of the conscious mission of my life, — needs a matter of perhaps 10,000 thalers. If I could ever command

such a sum, I would arrange thus: here, where I happen to be,— and where many a thing is far from bad, — I would erect, after my own plans, in a beautiful field near the town, a rough theatre of planks and beams, and merely furnish it with the decorations and machinery necessary for the production of *Siegfried*. Then I would select the best singers to be found anywhere, and invite them for six weeks to Zürich. I would try to form a chorus here consisting, for the most part, of amateurs; there are splendid voices here, and strong, healthy people. I would invite in the same way my orchestra. At the New Year, announcements and invitations to all the friends of the musical drama would appear in all the German newspapers, with a call to visit the proposed dramatic musical festival. Any one giving notice, and travelling for this purpose to Zürich, would receive a certain *entrée* — naturally, like all the *entrées*, gratis. Besides, I should invite to a performance the young people here, the university, the choral unions. When everything was in order, I should arrange, under these circumstances, for three performances of *Siegfried* in one week. After the third the theatre would be pulled down, and my score burnt. To those persons who had been pleased with the thing, I should then say, 'Now do likewise.' But if they wanted to hear something new from me, I should say, '*You* get the money!' Well, do I seem quite mad to you? It may be so, but I assure you to attain this end is the hope of my life, the prospect which alone can tempt me to take in hand a work of art. So — get me 10,000 thalers — that's all!"

It is quite remarkable to note how many features of the later Bayreuth Festivals are here foreshadowed. And so firm a hold did this plan at once take on his mind that he determined to give up the Weimar offer of 500 thalers, which were to be paid to him in the interim, in case he should deliver the *Siegfried* score by July 1, 1852. But besides the Festival idea there was another important consideration which induced him to modify his operatic plans. He had been haunted for some months

by the thought of the youth who sets out "'in order to learn fear,' and who is so stupid that he is never able to learn it. Think of my alarm when I suddenly discover that this youth is no other than the young Siegfried, who wins the hoard and awakes Brünnhilde. The scheme is now ready" (May 10, 1851). In other words, his Nibelung scheme had now advanced to *two* dramas, *Siegfried's Death* preceded by *Young Siegfried.* Concerning these two *Siegfried* dramas his intention is that "each shall in itself be an independent piece. They are only to be presented to the public in succession for the first time; afterwards each, according to taste or means, can be given quite by itself."

So *Siegfried's Death* was put aside for a moment, and *Young Siegfried* became the hero of the hour: "A thousand greetings to R's from me! Say to them that *to-day* my *Young Siegfried* came into the world ready and well-rhymed" (June 24, 1851). And what is of special interest, is to find that some of the *Young Siegfried* music also dates back as far as only four years after the completion of *Lohengrin:* —

"You perhaps cannot imagine it, but everything comes quite naturally. The musical phrases fit themselves on to the verses and periods without any trouble on my part; everything grows as if wild from the ground. I have already the beginning in my head; also some plastic motives, like the Fafner one. I am delighted at the thought of giving myself up wholly to it."

When Liszt heard of the new project, he wrote: "So we are to have a *young* Siegfried! You are really a perfectly incredible fellow, before whom one must take off hat and cap three times!" In his reply Wagner states that he is only wishing for a fine day to begin

writing the poem, which, he says, is already completed in his head. Five weeks later comes the news that the poem is finished: "It has given me GREAT pleasure, and at any rate it is such a thing as I was obliged to make now, and the best thing I have done so far." He is, in fact, so enthusiastic over his new project that he voluntarily renounces Breitkopf and Härtel's generous offer to print the full score of *Lohengrin* on condition that, in place of that, they preserve their good will and intentions for the forthcoming *Siegfried* score. For it seemed to him "fabulous" that any firm should be willing to print an opera like *Lohengrin*, which was only being performed in one city! He feared that this score might be an unprofitable investment, and then the Leipzig publishers would be unwilling to undertake his beloved *Siegfried*.

Great as was his confidence in his *alter ego*, Liszt, he was not going to have any more cuts and concessions, and performances lasting an hour too long. So, although *Young Siegfried* is now, in turn, intended for Weimar, he writes to Uhlig that he does not intend to have it produced there *unless he can be there himself*. But very soon the *Young Siegfried* also became altogether problematic for Weimar, and this was due to the maturing of the *complete* Nibelung plan — the *Walküre-Siegfried-Götterdämmerung* trilogy, with the introductory play of *Rheingold*. This complete scheme is first communicated to Uhlig under date of Nov. 12, 1851. A week later Liszt is informed of the Nibelung and the Festival plans at the same time.

One of the most curious and suggestive things about this Nibelung scheme is that Wagner, guided by an unconscious dramatic instinct, sketched out the complete

plot of the four dramas as early as 1848, before he wrote the poem of *Siegfried's Death*. This sketch is printed in Vol. II. of the Collected Works, and although some of its details were altered or omitted when the dramas were written, it remains to this day the most lucid and logical synopsis that has ever been made of his great work. And now note the sequel. When the author of *Siegfried's Death* made his preparations for setting his poem to music, he found that the subject was too big for one drama. To one who had read his preliminary sketch of the whole Nibelung Myth there would have been no difficulty in understanding the full significance of *Siegfried's Death*. But a stage drama should not need any preliminary essays and footnotes; it should present everything directly to the eyes and ears, should explain itself at every moment. A literary poet may address himself to the imagination, but a dramatist should appeal to the senses. It was this consideration that had induced him to alter the close of *Tannhäuser* in such a way as to bring the apparition of Venus and the body of Elizabeth actually on the stage, instead of merely hinting at them. And it was this consideration that now made him give up *Siegfried's Death* and evolve the gigantic Tetralogy, in the separate dramas of which he could bring before the *eyes* events which had in that drama been presented merely in the shape of *epic narrative:* —

"So, to make *Siegfried's Death* possible, I wrote *Young Siegfried;* but the more the whole took shape, the more did I perceive, while developing the scenes and music of *Young Siegfried*, that I had only increased the necessity for a clearer presentation of the whole story *to the senses*. I now see that, in order to become intelligible on the stage, I must work out the whole myth in plastic style. It was not this consideration alone which impelled me to

my new plan, but especially the overpowering impressiveness of the subject-matter which I thus acquire for presentation, and which supplies me with a wealth of material for artistic fashioning which it would be a sin to leave unused."

He then proceeds to give the first intimation of the *Walküre* and *Rheingold* plans.

So here we have the great work of his life laid out clearly and irrevocably. He also tells his friends that he feels the impossibility of producing such a work satisfactorily at any existing theatre, and that he is tired of doing things *by halves:* "With this my new conception I withdraw entirely from all connection with our theatre and public of to-day; I break decisively and forever with the formal present." "The performance of the Nibelung dramas must take place at a great Festival, specially arranged for this purpose." The four dramas must first be given in proper order, whereupon they may be repeated separately *ad libitum.* He adds that it will take him at least *three full years* to complete this work,—little dreaming that it would occupy him, with interruptions, for the next *twenty-three* years!

One more short extract from a letter to Uhlig (No. 35) may be given here by way of mirroring his mind at this time. It precedes the one just quoted from, by a few weeks: —

"I want a small house, with meadow and a little garden! To work with zest and joy, — but not for the present generation. . . . If all German theatres tumble down, I will erect a new one on the banks of the Rhine, gather every one together, and produce the whole [Trilogy] in the course of a week. — Rest! rest! rest! Country! country! a cow, a goat, etc. Then — health — happiness — hope! Else, everything lost. I care no more. You ***must*** come here!"

Wagner had reason to fear that his plan would, as he says, "on account of its almost bottomless mad audacity, be comprehended by no one"; and he was therefore greatly delighted to have Liszt — although it deprived that friend of the prospective pleasure of bringing out *Siegfried* at Weimar — approve of it cordially. *Siegfried's Death* and *Young Siegfried* were already versified; the next poem which he undertook was the *Walküre*. Of this there can be no doubt; for he says explicitly in a letter to Uhlig (Oct. 14, 1852): "The introductory evening is really a complete drama, quite rich in action: I have finished fully half of it. The *Walküre*,[1] entirely. The two *Siegfrieds*, however, must still be thoroughly revised, especially *Siegfried's Death*. But then — *it will be something!*"

On July 2, 1852, he imparts the information that he expects to finish the whole Nibelung poem by September or October and that he rejoices greatly at the thought of the music. It was not till December, however, that he wrote to Heine: "I have just finished my great Nibelung poem, and I mean to make a clean copy of the stuff, so that my friends, too, may be able to taste as much as possible of it. This will take up a full month of my time, for at present I can at most spend three hours on such work." While he was still busy with the poem, the desire to communicate it to his friends, before he set to work on the music, overcame him. He therefore purposed to have twenty-five or thirty copies of the whole poem made in fac-simile reprint. But who was to pay for this? He had no money, and it could be done only by means of a subscription among his friends. But as

[1] It was finished on July 1, 1852. See Letters to Uhlig, No. 67.

such a subscription was not forthcoming, he at last had the poems printed in the ordinary way at his own expense,—a few copies only for private distribution to his friends, and secretly, to avoid admonitions. "Those who know my situation," he writes to Liszt (Feb. 11, 1853), on sending him a few copies (for himself, the Grand Duchess, and the Princess of Prussia), "will, in face of this considerable expense, again have occasion to consider me a spendthrift: be it so! I must confess the world at large behaves towards me in such a miserly way that I feel no desire whatever to imitate it."

Liszt's enthusiasm over the Nibelung scheme is almost as great as Wagner's, and it leads him to hope that the work may be completed in less than three years. Should its author by that time still be debarred return to his country, Liszt offers to take upon himself the function of conductor, adding: "I hope, however, I shall have the pleasure of being able to enjoy your Nibelung Trilogy more quietly from parquet or balcony, and in that case, I invite you after each of the four performances to supper at the Hotel de Saxe [Dresden] or Hotel de Russie [Berlin], provided you will still be able to eat and drink after your exertions." The Princess von Wittgenstein read the whole of the Tetralogy on the day of its receipt, as Liszt informs his friend; it aroused her enthusiasm, and thereafter almost daily she quoted from it in conversing with Liszt. But of his other friends, only two (Franz Müller and Karl Ritter) as much as replied to acknowledge receipt of the copy to the author who was so thirsty for a little sympathy and encouragement in his audacious and unprecedented undertaking. While waiting for such a sign of sympathy, he describes himself as living solely

through the post: "With the most violent impatience I must await the postman every morning at 11 o'clock; if he brings me nothing at all, or nothing satisfactory, my whole day is one of resignation. That is my life! Why do I continue to live?"

LIFE IN ZÜRICH

We must now cast a partly retrospective glance at Wagner's life in Zürich during these years of literary and poetic work. A careless perusal of the correspondence with Liszt might give the impression that Wagner was dissatisfied with his situation in Zürich: for utterances of despair like the one just quoted abound in it; but on closer examination it will be seen that these expressions of despair and suicidal anguish almost invariably have their origin in disappointed artistic hopes, operatic misrepresentations and failures in Germany, or attacks of erysipelas or dyspepsia. With his life in Zürich as such, and with his friends there, he was highly pleased, as he points out over and over again. He informs Fischer on Nov. 9, 1850:—

"I shall now in any case remain in Zürich, where I have found a circle of very dear friends; when the time comes for you to retire from active life, you should by all means be so sensible as to come here. I can find no words to describe the agreeableness of life here; in Paris I had the genuine Swiss homesickness! The sturdy, honest folk here will be to your taste, and one can manage a household cheaply."

He playfully advises the royal chorus master of the Dresden opera to do his work badly so that he may the sooner be pensioned off, and then join him in Zürich. He appreciates the freedom with which he can give ex-

pression to his thoughts in Switzerland: "In Dresden I should have soured as Kapellmeister *loci*, because always maliciously attacked, pulled to pieces, and therefore rendered powerless." In Zürich, "I live protected by the true and genuine love of men who know me as I am, and who would not have me a jot otherwise. I am only to be envied." Again, in 1850, to Uhlig: —

"I feel very well again, back in Zürich, and I would choose to live here rather than anywhere else in the whole wide world. We have a most delightful dwelling by the lake, with the most magnificent views, garden, etc. In my house-coat I go down to the lake to bathe; a boat is there which we row ourselves. Besides, an excellent race of men, and whichever way we turn, sympathy, politeness, and the most touching readiness to do service: yes, more, and more trusty, friends than I could ever find in beautiful, big Dresden. All are glad to see me; of Philistines here I know only the Saxon exiles. Oh, how unfortunate and worthy of pity you seem to me in Dresden!"

In 1851, to Heine: —

"Ah, if no one would pity me any more on account of my loss of my Dresden position! How little they know me who look upon this loss as my misfortune! Were I amnestied to-day, and were I again appointed chief Kapellmeister at Dresden, you would see how calmly I should remain in my Switzerland, and perhaps scarcely even put my feet on the blessed soil of the German confederacy! Yes, that is how I feel."

And once more, to Liszt (March 4, 1853): —

"Should you ever succeed, in the gigantic perseverance of your friendship, in again making Germany accessible to me, be assured that I would make no other use of this privilege than occasionally to visit *Weimar*, take part in your doings for a little while, and here and there attend some decisive first performance of my operas. This I must have — this is a necessity of my life, and this is what I miss at present so dreadfully and so painfully!"

He felt instinctively that he could work best in the Swiss solitude, where he could have plenty of tonic mountain air as brain food, without having to dissipate his energies in rehearsals and other practical work, which always exhausted him for the time being. Here, too, he is safe from all danger of political molestation. To the Swiss authorities he was no exile; his expulsion would have had to be specially demanded by the Holy Alliance, and in that case he could have saved himself by immediately becoming a citizen of the Swiss republic. Hence he remains indifferent to the renewal, in 1853, of the warrant against him, in consequence of the rumor that he was about to visit Germany. All police authorities were again admonished to keep their eyes open, and, in case of his capture, to forward him at once to Dresden. There was also, at one time, a rumor that he had been pardoned. The postmaster of Hausen came running breathlessly to his house with the newspaper containing the (false) report; but, to his astonishment, the exiled composer remained "terribly indifferent" to this bit of news.

To avoid police interference with his letters, he had them sent at first to the address of his sister-in-law, Natalie Planer, at Zürich. Swiss postal arrangements were rather primitive in those days, and his letters contain constant references, which now seem quaint, to expensive postage, to forwarding newspapers and scores by freight-wagon in order to save expense, and the like. Occasionally he is short of stamps, and then he begs his correspondent to get even with him by not prepaying postage on *his* next letter, in turn.

During his ten years' sojourn at Zürich, he repeatedly

changed his residence. His ideal of a home for a working artist was a little villa overlooking the lake, with flower-garden, animals, and rooms for visiting friends. For a time he lived in Zürich; then (in 1850 and 1851) in a house by the lake, known to his friends as "Villa Rienzi." Among these Zürich friends were Baumgartner and Alex. Müller, musicians; Sulzer, Hagenbusch, cantonal officials; Wille, a Hamburg journalist who had gone back to live in Switzerland, the home of his ancestors; Herwegh, the well-known poet; and Wesendonck, a retired merchant of wealth, who was fond of music, and whose wife was one of the first and most ardent Wagner enthusiasts. The Willes, at their charming villa at the neighboring Mariafeld, were often visited by Wagner in company of Herwegh or of Liszt, when the great pianist happened to be at Zürich; and for a time he lived with the Willes altogether as their guest. Frau Wille was a novelist of some note, and she has contributed valuable material to the personal side of Wagner's biography by publishing,[1] with a running commentary, fifteen letters of his. Frau Wille had first met him at Dresden in 1843, and his appearance had made an indelible impression on her memory: —

"the delicate mobile figure, the head with the mighty forehead, the keen eyes, and the energetic traits about his small, firmly closed mouth. An artist who sat next to me, called my attention to the straight, projecting chin, which, as if cut from stone, gave the face a peculiar character. Wagner's wife was of pleasing appearance; she was gay and talkative, and appeared to be especially happy in society. He himself was very animated, self-conscious, but amiable and free from affectation."

[1] In the *Deutsche Rundschau*, May and June, 1887.

Neither Wille nor Herwegh was musical, but that made no difference to Wagner, who, as his writings attest, and unlike musicians of the old type, took a deep interest in many things not connected with his own art. To Wille he said one day: "You are not musical; you say that you create nothing! But what of that? You have life. When you are present, original ideas come into one's head."

It was about this time that he was first introduced to the works of Schopenhauer, by Herwegh, who had brought them to Marienfeld: "Wagner, with incredible rapidity of conception, soon had sped through the philosopher's works. He and Herwegh were astounded at finding the world's riddle solved. Resignation and asceticism — that was to be the goal of mankind." And now followed long discussions on this system of pessimism, which Wagner could lay as an unction on his many wounds.

Herwegh was a great linguist, and an enthusiast for foreign poets, and it was probably the contagion of this enthusiasm that inspired such passages as the following in Wagner's letters to his friend Uhlig: —

"To you and K. I recommend my new friend, the English poet Shelley. There is but one German version of him, that by Seybt, which you must get. He and his friend Byron together make a perfectly delightful man." "Get the poems of *Hafis*. . . . This Persian Hafis is the GREATEST poet that ever lived and wrote. — If you do not immediately buy him, I shall despise you beyond measure: charge the costs to the *Tannhäuser* account."

Besides thus widening Wagner's literary horizon, Herwegh was a friend who offered to translate *Tannhäuser* for him into French prose; who accompanied him on

excursions and to hydropathic establishments; gave him hygienic advice ("for the present Herwegh is my physician; his physical and physiological knowledge is great, and in every respect he is more sympathetic to me than any doctor"); and one of Herwegh's most important achievements was that he helped in securing a good portrait of Wagner of that period. As the latter relates to Uhlig (April 9, 1852): —

"I wrote to you about a painting animal who wanted to catch me: it is done. The first portrait was bad, because the idiot did not understand me. Then Herwegh came to the sittings, and under his minutest guidance — with his intellect and practised eye — a really good portrait has been obtained, which will soon appear here; and yesterday I offered it to Breitkopf and Härtel for publication."

While Herwegh and Wille were not interested in music, Frau Wille was, and thus it happened that Wagner occasionally showed himself in his element at her house. He would sit at her piano and play from *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, from memory.

"At the same time he explained the events on the stage, and hinted at the plot, singing the text softly. It was a remarkable and unique way of making us realize what we could not see with our eyes and hear interpreted by an orchestra. Of the work on which he was engaged Wagner did not speak, but he did dwell on the pleasures of idling. In his amiable mood he expressed satisfaction with the progress of his work."

On another occasion, when Herwegh and Wille were discussing philology and natural science, Wagner came to the ladies with the remark, "the other two are digging roots again; that will take up some time." He laughed and opened the piano.

"I shall never forget," continues Frau Wille, "how, before he began to play, he explained to us the character of the Ninth Symphony, and proved the necessity of the chorus and the Hymn to Joy for the completion of the great tone-poem. . . . I have often since heard the Ninth Symphony, but this *allegro vivace alla marcia* I have heard only *once*. . . . Wagner looked serious, dignified, yet amiable. An old Zürich lady, our neighbor, usually most sedate and hard to move, was electrified when subsequently he played with great enthusiasm and in all its grandeur the chorus, 'Seid umschlungen, Millionen.' In the midst of it he stopped. 'I cannot play the piano, you know,' he exclaimed. 'You do not applaud. Now finish it yourselves!'"

About Christmas, 1852, Wagner read his Nibelung Trilogy to his friends at Mariafeld, in three evenings. Subsequently he read them, with *Rheingold*, to a larger circle at the Hotel Bauer in Zürich. On the former occasion, "I spoiled Wagner's humor," Frau Wille relates,

"by leaving the room on the last evening while he was still reading. My little boy had fever and wanted me. When I appeared the next morning, Wagner said that the boy was not dangerously ill; that it was a disagreeable criticism on an author, to leave in that way; and he called me 'Fricka.' That settled it; I did not protest against the name."

A MODERN PROMETHEUS

The charming glimpses of Wagner's life during the first five or six years at Zürich thus given by Frau Wille, and corroborated by the composer's own letters, show that if he had been an ordinary man, such as nature produces by the dozen (*Duzend-Waare der Natur*, as Schopenhauer calls them), he would have had reason to be contented and happy. But he was neither contented nor happy — except when he was hard at work on his

Trilogy. There were indeed moments when he looked at the world in a cheerful spirit. In one of these — during a spell of unusually good health — he writes to Uhlig: —

"I now take a childlike interest in things to which I had already become indifferent — *e.g.* about our new house, which is certainly small, but cosy and quiet. With true childlike joy every day I bring in something to make our exile-home more complete and comfortable. So now I have had my 'complete works' bound in red: there are already five volumes; the three opera poems will make the sixth. These trifles exercise a beneficent and diverting effect on my over-excited mind, just as a hip-bath soothes the head; and, like this, I intend those to form part of my *régime*. Besides, my artistic plans are spreading out before me, and ever becoming richer, more pleasurable, and more decided; and it is with quite a thrill of delight that I think of soon working them out." (Nov. 28, 1851.)

Similar moments of delight came to him when — as rarely happened — he received news of a good and successful performance of one of his operas, as for instance at Breslau, in October, 1852; an event which gave rise to this outpouring: —

"The postman has just interrupted me by bringing me a letter from the Breslau Kapellmeister, about the extraordinary success of the first performance of *Tannhäuser:* the man writes quite beside himself with joy and ecstasy, and I myself am so delighted with it, that I cannot continue my letter to-day, because my peace has been completely taken from me, and this time in such an agreeable manner!"

But these moments of rapture the reader of the three volumes of Wagner's Correspondence will find quite exceptional. Usually the wind blows from the opposite quarter: —

"I lead here entirely a dream-life: if I awake, it is to suffer," he writes to Liszt. "How foolish it is in you to still make efforts to help me. . . . What could help me? My nights are mostly sleepless — weary and miserable I leave my bed to see a day before me which is destined to bring me not one joy. Surroundings which only torture me and from which I withdraw only to torture myself in turn! Whatever I touch I loathe. — This cannot continue thus! I care no longer to live."

Again, on Jan. 15, 1854: —

"Dear Franz! None of the past years has gone by without having at least *once* driven me to the very verge of suicide. . . . I cannot live like a dog, cannot sleep on straw and drink fusel: I must have some kind of sympathy, if my mind is to succeed in the toilsome work of creating a new world."

Many pages might be filled with such bitter outpourings into the hearts of Liszt and Uhlig. Wagner was not a cold-blooded military hero, or a stolid, soulless Philistine: he was a man of genius, an imaginative artist whose nature and mission was the expression of emotion. Ordinary people cannot conceive how intense must be *real* and *personal* emotions to a genius who can give such powerful expression to *imagined* woes as he has done in his tragedies. His feelings, his moods, were too vivid to be repressed: "I cry out when I feel pain," he exclaimed; and his moods and desires changed as suddenly and as violently as those of a child. One moment he rails at the idea of the "future," rails at fame, and at all his ideals; the next moment he curses the whole world because he hears that somewhere one of his operas has been performed without regard to those ideals! One day he avers that he is already completely indifferent to praise and recognition; the next day he

declares he can live no longer without some signs of appreciation; and coddles himself with the thought that women, at any rate, favor him. Let not Philistines judge such a man from their own unemotional point of view. Rather, let them read his Correspondence and learn therefrom how *they* would feel and act under his circumstances if they were men of genius.

To one of the most heart-rending effusions received by him, Liszt replied: —

"Your letters are sad — and your life sadder still. You want to go out into the wide world, live, enjoy, revel! Ah! how cordially I wish you could! but do you not feel, after all, that the thorn and the wound which you have in your heart will leave you nowhere, and can never be healed? — Your greatness constitutes also your misery — the two are inseparably united, and must ever annoy and torture you."

Liszt here puts his finger on the wound: Wagner was a modern Prometheus, whose vital organs were daily gnawed at by critics and other Philistines because he had had the audacity to steal from heaven the fire of genius — a blaze which showed their own lights to be mere tallow candles.

Wagner compares himself to his idol: —

"Strange that my fate should be like Beethoven's! he could not hear his music because he was *deaf*. . . . I cannot hear mine because I am more than deaf, because I do not live in my time at all, because I move among you as one who is dead, because the world is full of — fellows! . . . Oh that I should not arise from my bed to-morrow, awake no more to this loathsome life!"

The chief torture lay not in his exile, not in his inability to return to Germany; it lay in the fact that, on considering the real state of affairs, he ***could not wish*** to

return to Germany: "I am glad that the royal Saxon police makes it impossible for me to attend the performances of my operas, which, after all, would only annoy me." "I am glad not to hear all the wretched performances of my operas in Germany, which would probably only break my heart." This is the key to his unhappiness in Zürich. He had composed three operas, with a pen dipped into his heart-blood, and these were now being mutilated by conductors, misinterpreted by singers, misrepresented by critics, misunderstood by the public; while he, the exiled father, had to witness from a distance this prostitution of his noble offspring — a Prometheus Bound, unable to help himself.

Let us look at the situation fairly and squarely. He had composed the *Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*, and knew that they were three of the best operas then in existence, while the world at large did not know this. You might say therefore that the musical world was not to be blamed for not receiving these operas as we now think they ought to have been received — with open arms. True: we may absolve the public from blame, but we cannot absolve the musicians and the critics. It was their duty, on meeting with a new form of operatic art, to study, learn, investigate, before they misperformed and then condemned. But had they any opportunity to learn, when the composer was an exile, unable to come and teach them? Plenty of it. Wagner had confidence in Liszt as in his *alter ego;* Liszt was willing and *glad* to accede to his wishes that he should superintend the performances of his operas in Berlin and Leipzig, in order to see that they were correctly interpreted and their success made possible: but the foolish

managers and jealous conductors *refused to accept his services,* though offered free! The details of this extraordinary proceeding may be found in the Wagner-Liszt Correspondence, and they constitute one of the most astounding chapters in the history of music.

More than that: they weened they knew better than Wagner himself. At least, they and their singers took no pains whatever to learn his intentions from his writings. Take, for instance, the *Tannhäuser* Guide, to which we referred in the chapter on that opera. That essay was at first intended as a contribution to Brendel's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik.* But after he had finished it he concluded that it would accomplish its mission much more thoroughly if it were published as a pamphlet. Accordingly he had it so printed at his own expense, poor as he was. Then he sent copies to the leading opera-houses, and a large number also to Uhlig, with the request to give one *gratis* with every copy of the score that was sold. A few conductors, like Liszt at Weimar, and Schindelmeisser at Wiesbaden, paid attention to it; but these were exceptional cases. In Munich the six copies provided by Wagner were found, many years later, *uncut,* in the library of the opera-house! In Leipzig the result was still more peculiar. On Oct. 1, 1852, Wagner wrote to Uhlig: "To-day I have received W.'s letter, containing the announcement that after taking cognizance of my guide to the performance of *Tannhäuser,* the Leipzig theatre was obliged to give up this opera, and that the score was sent back to you."

Please note that this was *Leipzig,* only forty years ago — Leipzig, which, as all the histories of music tell us, had been raised by the efforts of Mendelssohn to the rank

of the musical centre of Germany! Do you wonder that Wagner was subsequently so anxious *not* to have *Lohengrin* produced in that city, when they wanted it there? He refused permission at first, but finally yielded, because he needed the honorarium for his bread and butter; but Liszt's aid had been refused, and the result, as the reader knows, was a failure as miserable as that of *Tannhäuser* had been in the same city a year before.

The fact is so extraordinary that it must be repeated, in order to impress it on the memory — *Lohengrin*, forty years ago, was at first considered "impossible" at the musical centre of Germany, then "tried" and "executed" mercilessly! And Leipzig was far from being alone in this matter: it marked the rule to which there were few exceptions. The German theatres in general considered *Lohengrin* almost impossible of performance. To quote only one witness on this point — the most reliable of all — Härtel, Wagner's publisher, wrote to him "in great distress" (Letter to Uhlig, Nov. 10, 1852) that "the director, etc., declared that my operas contained insuperable difficulties, '*and from most of the theatres* (so W. said) *the same complaints come in.*' — Nice fellows those!" Did Wagner, then, exaggerate in speaking to Liszt of "the wretched state of artistic affairs" in Germany? Or can we wonder that, instead of welcoming a performance of *Lohengrin* at Dresden in the same year, he *protested* against it?

Protest against the production of his own opera? The absurd man! Should he not, in his poverty, have welcomed any and every performance, under any conditions? Many will think so, and at that time everybody but Liszt seemed to take that view. Wagner was of a different

mind. "How few men," he exclaims in one of his first letters to Uhlig — "how few men like themselves better than their stomachs!" He liked his own stomach very much indeed; he was a born epicure, and no one ever craved comfort and luxury more than he did: but not an inch did this make him budge from what he considered his duty to his ideals. He would have received the same sum of money whether the opera was to be poorly performed or well; yet he preferred no performance at all to a poor one. It was not eccentricity, but the nobility of his artistic character, that made him write such sentences as these: "I will *not* allow *Lohengrin* to be given at Leipzig, even if I provoke public scandal over the matter. I am going to see if these people will be able to avoid knowing *who I am!*" "I have withdrawn *Lohengrin* everywhere for this winter" (1852). Think of an artist being compelled by his conscience to take such measures against his own favorite work, five years after its completion, — a work which on the other side he was yearning with all his soul to send out into the world, — and you will comprehend the melancholy moods and mixed emotions expressed in his letters of this period. And when, in the following year, he nevertheless yielded to importunities and ceded his early operas to the theatres, you will understand why those emotions became still more mixed and painful.

"And this torture, trouble, and care for a life which I hate, which I curse! — and for this to make myself ridiculous in the eyes of my visitors, — and to enjoy at the same time the *ecstasy* of having given up the *noblest work* of my life to the foreknown bungling incompetence of our theatre-rabble and to the derision of the Philistine!"

He regrets bitterly having "prostituted" *Tannhäuser*

and *Lohengrin* by giving them up to "the devil, that is, the theatres": "Oh, how proud and free was I when I still reserved these works for you alone at Weimar! Now I am a slave and utterly helpless." But there is still one hope and consolation — the *Nibelung's Ring*. That shall have a better fate, or perish! "If I die without having produced that work, I leave it to you; and if you die without having had opportunity to perform it in a worthy manner, you — *will burn it: — let that be agreed upon!*"

What annoyed him beyond measure was that — apart from Liszt — most of his intimate friends, even, were too obtuse and too philistine to comprehend his attitude toward his own operas. It was bad enough to have his publishers complain that he was too fussy.

"Härtel wrote to me (recently in answer to my offer of *Iphigenia* and the *Faust* overture for publication) in a most caterwauling and discouraged tone about my conduct, declaring that I made it so difficult, and almost impossible, to all the theatres to give my operas: that my treatment of Leipzig was too discouraging, my demands for *mise-en-scène* too reckless, etc."

Wagner, of course, insisted on these conditions because he knew that only if the operas were *correctly* performed, would a permanent success be possible. It was more discouraging still to have even his bosom friend Fischer consider the *Tannhäuser* Guide a rather foolish thing on the whole, he being of the opinion that the way for his operas should be made as smooth as possible. On this point Wagner expresses himself to Heine (December, 1852) in clear and forcible language: —

"The small attention which G[enast at Weimar] paid to all my hints and directions, appears to have made your hair stand on end.

And yet Papa *Fischer* blames me so much for my Guide to *Tannhäuser* — he always imagines it to be my sole concern to see my operas performed, and that it is *therefore* 'unwise' to make so many out-of-the-way demands! I have indeed good ground for shame to have been misunderstood on the most important points even by you and him. I care ABSOLUTELY NOTHING about my things BEING GIVEN; I am only anxious that they should be so GIVEN as I intended; he who will not and cannot do that, let him leave them alone. That is my whole meaning — and has Fischer not *yet* found that out? O you hardened sinner! *Na*, greet him heartily."

It is not strange that, ever since the days of Plato, Philistines have regarded men of genius as madmen. Wagner surely was a madman; for does he not confess that after the *Lohengrin* fiasco at Leipzig he was on the point of risking his liberty by going to Germany to set things right? And did he not brood over the wrongs done to his operas, until they became the cause of a persistent nightmare?

"For a long time," he writes to Fischer, "I have been constantly dreaming that I was back in Dresden, but secretly hidden in your house; and just as secretly you brought me into the theatre, and there I heard one of my operas, but all wrong and out of time, so that I became wild, and wanted to shout out loud, from which you, in great alarm, were trying to stop me."

THE "CIRCUS HÜLSEN" IN BERLIN

How wise he was in insisting on correct performances of his works (as music-*dramas* not as mere lyric *operas*), is shown by the simple fact that when *Tannhäuser*, in 1890–91, was put on the stage anew at Dresden, Berlin, and Hamburg in exact accordance with his intentions, the number of performances of that opera was raised

from nine, thirteen, and six in the preceding season, to eighteen, twenty-nine, and eighteen respectively; that is, it was doubled in Dresden, more than doubled in Berlin, and trebled in Hamburg, although in this last case they did not even use the Paris version, with its scenic splendors.

Yet it was at Berlin — which, in the season of 1890–91 led all Germany with eighty-one Wagner performances, and which, in the same season, celebrated its *three hundredth* performance of *Tannhäuser* — that the most astounding farce was enacted over this opera — a farce so long drawn out that *Tannhäuser* was not heard there till *more than ten years* after its *première* at Dresden, and until after forty other cities had heard and applauded it. The story of this farce is such an interesting chapter in the history of musical Philistinism, and illustrates so vividly what practical difficulties and what kind of managers and conductors Wagner had to contend with all his life, that it may here be told in some detail.[1] Although *Tannhäuser* was first produced in Dresden in 1845, the Berlin authorities do not appear to have ever seriously meditated its performance till about seven years later. In August, 1852, Wagner writes: —

"I do not yet know how matters stand with Berlin: I have demanded a honorarium of 1000 thalers, assigning good reasons for my demand, and have given them clearly to understand that I will not prostitute myself again for Berlin at such a cheap rate." (His *Rienzi* and *Holländer* had been cruelly treated there.) "Probably they will decline: I must risk it. If I accomplish anything, it can be only by terrorism."

[1] The facts are gathered from about fifty of the letters that passed between Wagner and his correspondents.

To Liszt he wrote about the same time, begging him, if he could sacrifice the time, to go to Berlin and ensure a correct performance by supervising the rehearsals. Liszt replied that he approved of his "exceptionally high terms," under the circumstances, and that he was quite willing to go to Berlin, provided he received an invitation from the Intendant to assist at the preparations. But the Intendant, Botho von Hülsen — mark his name; it will often recur in the remaining pages of this biography — was more of a Tartar than Wagner and Liszt knew when they began dealing with him. In the first place, he put his foot down on the one thousand thaler honorarium. The composer yielded, in part, accepting, instead, a *tantième*, or percentage, of the box office receipts. By this arrangement, he consoled himself, he might "with luck, gain more than a thousand thalers." In the second place, the great Botho von Hülsen was offended by the proposal that Liszt should attend the rehearsals of the opera. He seemed to look on this as a personal insult to his conductors.

By September the outlook had become discouraging. It had been "discovered suddenly that *Tannhäuser* could not be produced on any one of the royal birthdays." The opera could not, according to Wagner's calculations, be given before January, and as his niece Johanna was to leave Berlin in February, he felt compelled to make the condition that ten performances for that winter be guaranteed him, "to avoid the risk of having this opera also put aside after the third or fourth performance, like the *Dutchman* and *Rienzi*, which had been declared failures for that very reason." If this guarantee were refused, he was determined to take back the score. This

time, von Hülsen was more tractable. Johanna was to remain in Berlin longer, and Hülsen assured him by letter that he hoped to give the opera more than ten times and would undertake to arrange for six performances in the first month. "In short," thought Wagner, "the matter is in order." He even heard that they were thinking in Berlin of soon following up this opera with *Lohengrin:* "The Princess of Prussia has heard it again lately (October 2d) at Weimar, and has probably made things hot for *Hülsen.*"

A few weeks later the tide had turned again, and the composer poured out his sorrows into Liszt's heart in a letter dated Nov. 9: —

"Hülsen has declined [to accept your services]. I enclose his letter. He has no conception of what is in question here, and I shall never be able to make him understand. This Hülsen is personally an amiable man, but he has not the slightest knowledge of the business over which he is called to preside: about *Tannhäuser* he treats with me as with Flotow about *Martha.* It is most disgusting! . . . From all the reports by Hülsen and my brother I had meanwhile seen clearly that these people are entirely without understanding of what is essential and important to me in this affair; that all their views are so hopelessly bounded by matters of routine, as to make me fear that they would not at all comprehend my wish to have you called to Berlin. I confess that for this reason I went about it with some feelings of apprehension! At last I wrote to Hülsen himself, taking great pains to be as explanatory, thorough, cordial, and persuasive as possible: I called his attention in advance to the fact that the possible hostile feeling that might be aroused in the (most insignificant) Berlin conductors, was null and void compared with the favorable influence in my behalf which you would exert in every direction; in short, I wrote in such a way that I considered an unfavorable reply quite impossible. — Now read the enclosed answer and convince yourself that I have once more suffered my usual fate of crying out with my whole soul, and striking against walls of leather."

Hülsen had promised that after the Queen's birthday (Nov. 13, 1852) *Tannhäuser* should be forthwith put into rehearsal. But he did not keep his promise. In the following January Wagner heard from his niece at Berlin that Flotow's *Indra* and Auber's *Lac des Fées* were to be given before his opera. This was too much for his irascible temper. He wrote to Berlin that he considered such treatment in the light of an insult, and demanded back his score.

Liszt approved of this movement, adding: "But whether they will comply with your demand is a different question." Wagner replies promptly: "You fancied they would not return the score I had demanded back from Berlin: this time you erred! The score was sent back at once, and neither Hülsen nor any one else wrote me a word about it."

One thing was gained by this: all previous negotiations and concessions were now annulled, and could be renewed in a different form. Liszt, relying on his diplomatic skill, advises his friend to put the matter henceforth in his own hands, and Wagner wisely accepts his suggestion: "Twice I have produced an opera of mine in Berlin and on both occasions I was unfortunate; this time I should therefore prefer to leave the undertaking entirely in your hands." This was written in March. In the following month the question entered into an entirely new phase. There was a project of giving *Tannhäuser* at a non-royal theatre in Berlin, — Kroll's, — which both Wagner and Liszt approved of. Another offer was to take the Leipzig company over to give a performance at another subordinate Berlin theatre; this Liszt declined; and as for the project at Kroll's,

that was frustrated by the sly machinations of Hülsen, who secured an order forbidding the performance of operas like *Tannhäuser* at the smaller theatres! The next step was an attempt to give *Tannhäuser* at Kroll's as an operatic concert (without scenery and action), in which form it would not have clashed with the new law; but this scheme was wisely frustrated by Liszt; and when still another project appeared, — a desire on the part of the Königsberg troupe to give the opera in Berlin, — Wagner himself sent in his veto.

More than a year after the *Tannhäuser* score had been returned to its author without an answer, the courteous Herr von Hülsen endeavored to reopen negotiations by writing a short note to Liszt, asking under what conditions he would grant permission to produce *Tannhäuser* in the following winter. In his reply Liszt dwelt on the facts that if Wagner imposed special conditions on Berlin, it was because he attached special importance to a successful performance in that city, and its consequences; that these conditions were solely made in order to insure an effective performance, and therefore a popular success; that the author's pecuniary demands would not be excessive; and that he himself, though he would have to give up a month of his time, would not ask for any compensation. But Hülsen did not approve of this letter. He declared he was "unwilling to agree to any conditions which would reflect on the dignity of the Institute and its capability, or affect the authority of its Intendant"; adding, "I demand the composer's confidence in me and the royal stage." To which Liszt replies with a final eloquent effort to convince Hülsen of the reasonableness of Wagner's conditions: Surely he must know, as an

expert, how greatly the success of dramatic works depended on the manner of their performance; must know, for instance, how largely the popularity and impressiveness of Spontini's and Meyerbeer's operas in Berlin were due to the co-operation of their composers at their production; to which Liszt adds his ultimatum that if Hülsen does not agree to his co-operation in Wagner's place, matters must be left in *statu quo*.

And what did Hülsen reply to this? Here is the conclusion of his letter: "That, after two vain attempts to secure this work for the royal theatre, the management can undertake no third, as long as I have the honor to stand at its head, is self-evident. I regret this." But it was not the last time; for in March, 1855, Wagner informed Liszt that Hülsen had applied to him again through Fromman (for the last time, as he said!); he promised him all imaginable things; the opera was to be given in the autumn. Tired of the whole business, and feeling greatly in need of money (he was in London at that time), he gave his consent — a proceeding which for a moment piqued Liszt, in whose hands the whole matter had been placed. But the great pianist adored his friend too much to bear any resentment against him for this slight business irregularity. On the contrary, in October he took extra pains with a performance of *Tannhäuser* which was given at Weimar for the special edification of the Berliners, — Intendant Hülsen, Conductor Dorn, Tenor Formes, the regisseur, etc. And when, on Jan. 7, 1856, *Tannhäuser* was at last produced in Berlin, Liszt sent this telegram: "Yesterday *Tannhäuser*. Excellent performance. Wonderful scenery. Decided popular success. Good luck to you."

A letter followed, with details. The diplomatic Liszt had succeeded where his brusque, free-spoken friend had failed. It need hardly be said that the visit of the Berliners to Weimar had been a ruse arranged by Liszt for dodging the difficulty of his giving any *direct* instructions to Conductor Dorn — which would have offended that dignitary's pride. Nay, the wily Liszt even succeeded in making the Berliners — Hülsen and Dorn — invite his co-operation at the preparations in their city, — not at the orchestral rehearsals; *that* would have hurt Dorn's feelings, — but at the preliminary *piano-forte* rehearsals. Of course there could be no objection to *that*, even on the part of the most conceited of conductors; for was not Liszt the greatest pianist in the world, and would not *any* opera-house be glad to accept his services at the piano rehearsals of an opera, especially when they were given free of charge? Dorn took great pains with the orchestra, Johanna Wagner and Formes were excellent, and so Liszt was able to write on the whole a favorable criticism of the performance (Correspondence, No. 209). There is reason to believe that the Princess of Prussia *had*, as Wagner suspected, "made things hot for Hülsen"; for the King himself had suddenly taken such an interest in the matter that he had ordered the scene of the second act to be a faithful copy of the restoration plan of the Wartburg, and for this purpose had specially sent Gropius to Eisenach. The result of these measures was that Liszt could write that he had "never and nowhere seen anything comparable to the splendor of this scenic outfit."

Such, in brief, is the story of the ten years' struggle to force one of the most beautiful and popular operas ever

written, on the Intendant of the Berlin opera-house. And if this tale does not explain to the reader why Hans von Bülow once referred to that institution as the "Circus Hülsen," the fact that the same Intendant repeated exactly the same farce, equally prolonged, with the *Nibelung's Ring*, twenty years later, will make the matter clear, apart from Bülow's personal provocation. Hülsen's folly, moreover, was emphasized by the results. He had refused $750 for all the rights to *Tannhäuser*, but this opera became at once so popular that he had to pay the composer over $1300 in *tantièmes* the first year. This we know from a letter[1] addressed to Director J. Hoffmann of the Josefstädter Theatre in Vienna, a short extract from which will also show how recklessly Wagner sometimes bartered away the copyright of his works: —

"Zürich, March 14, 1857. Dear Friend! Let us cut the matter short! You pay me for every performance of *Tannhäuser* $20, sending me $400, or the receipts for the first twenty performances, in advance. For the following thirty performances you will pay me the *tantièmes* every quarter; after the fiftieth all my claims shall cease. My terms are based on my Berlin experiences; there, where the performance is not at all according to my desires, every performance brings me an average of $60 or more. In course of the first year there were twenty-two repetitions."

Subsequently, however, Hülsen deliberately neglected this opera, and the composer's income dwindled.

MONEY TROUBLES

Some of the most despondent pessimistic moods recorded in Wagner's Correspondence were brought on

[1] Manuscript, in Oesterlein's Wagner-Museum in Vienna.

by the prolonged Berlin squabble, and his despair of ever gaining foothold in the Prussian capital. The matter was a most serious one to him. When *Tannhäuser* made its tardy entrance in Berlin, he had already finished the composition of *Rheingold* and half of the *Walküre*, — works of his *third* style, — and Berlin was still a stranger to his *second* style! Moreover, it would have been a great boon to him if he could have had an income in Berlin from his early operas, while he was composing his Trilogy in Switzerland. There was hardly a day when he was not harassed by petty money matters, which took up a good part of the little energy which his poor health usually left him for work. When his Correspondence with Liszt appeared, most of the German reviewers, with a malice equalled only by their obtuseness, derided him for his "impudence" and "shamelessness" in constantly borrowing money and accepting presents from Liszt and other friends. But the melancholy fact is that he had no choice whatever in the matter: either he had to do what he did, or else give up music altogether; which, for a man with his instincts, was as impossible as for a fish to stop swimming.

His pecuniary embarrassments would have never assumed quite so serious an aspect had not a few indiscretions, at the beginning of his professional career, plunged him up to the ears in debts, which weighed him down for many years. These indiscretions were the outcome of his belief in his genius and its financial value — a belief which to-day we all share, but in which he was unluckily too far ahead of the world. I refer to the incidents related in the preceding pages of his borrowing money to bring out his *Novice of Palermo* (an

opera no worse than hundreds that have succeeded for a time, and which failed only from a curious combination of untoward circumstances); and more especially to his rash act in assuming the publication of his own *Rienzi, Dutchman,* and *Tannhäuser,* for which undertaking he borrowed several thousand dollars. As his *Rienzi* had been a sensational success in Dresden, and the other two works far from financial failures, what could have been more natural than the sanguine belief of the young composer that his operas would soon enable him to repay the borrowed sum, and enrich him besides? Publishers have since made hundreds of thousands out of those operas; to the composer himself they were only a source of daily mortification. We have seen, too, how unsuccessful he was in all his efforts to make a living, even by the humblest sort of drudgery, such as he offered to do during his three years at Paris; what wonder that he left debts everywhere, and that when for the time he had some humble employment, or a small salary, he almost always had to ask for part of it in advance? He had an advance of salary at Riga when he fled to Paris; an advance at Dresden when he had to leave that city; when he left Paris for Dresden, Schlesinger had paid him in advance for some arrangements he was to make of the scores of Meyerbeer's *Robert* and Halévy's *Reine de Chypre;* and Weimar, thanks to Liszt, paid him in advance for the projected *Young Siegfried* to enable him to devote his time to its composition.

He was anxious to pay off his debts, and for this purpose he had put aside all the income from his scores. But here, as in everything else, ill luck pursued him. When his early operas began to make their way, a brisk

demand soon sprang up for these scores, and if the business had been properly managed, it would soon have proved remunerative; but he himself, being an exile, could not look after it, and all his appeals to the publisher Meser — and ultimately to the creditors themselves to take the matter in their hands for their own benefit — were futile. When one edition was exhausted, Meser had made no preparations for a new one; when an arrangement of *Tannhäuser* for piano alone was in great demand, none was provided; managers, singers, and amateurs frequently had to write repeatedly, and wait weeks, before they got an answer to their demands for scores; and so things went on year after year, from bad to worse, and in the meantime the creditors worried the poor composer to death.

Besides having these debts, he was handicapped by being called on to support not only himself and wife, but his wife's parents. Sometimes it would take the last penny in the house to make up the twenty or more thalers which Minna sent to pay the expenses of her parents in Dresden. Let the following, from a letter to Uhlig (Oct. 1, 1852), be an illustration of the sorry plight to which the household was often reduced. Money was greatly needed, but a small sum was soon expected from Leipzig, where *Tannhäuser* was to be produced, when the news came that the project of giving the opera had been abandoned: —

"Whereupon my wife suddenly begins her lamentation, that today was the first of October, and that she was disconsolate at not being able to pay the rent for her parents! That is indeed the cruellest part of it; *I* have momentarily no money at all, and if Frankfurt does not send some soon, I shall be in a sorry plight.

Now you spoke to me lately of the savings bank of your children, of a father-in-law who might help in a moment of need. Tell me, could you expend ten thalers for me till November (when you will again receive R.'s money for me) and give them in my name to my mother-in-law?"

Imagine the composer of *Lohengrin* having to rack his brain with such far-fetched, positively ludicrous plans to meet his self-assumed obligations! The author of operas whose mere *interpreters* often receive a thousand dollars for *one evening's* work! Who does not feel how pathetically Wagner was right when he exclaimed in reference to an offer to go to America, some years later: "Great Heavens! such sums as I could earn (??) in America people ought to give me for a present, without asking anything else in return than what I am now doing, and which is the best I can do." And who does not realize the gross injustice in the world's relative treatment of creative men of genius and mere interpreters which is brought out by the following passage in a letter from Liszt: "Dawison told me the other day that his recent series of performances in Berlin paid for the purchase of a villa near Dresden. — At this rate you ought to be able to buy with your scores all Zürich, besides the seven *Churfürsten* and the lake!"[1]

Not only was he denied his liberty, and often the com-

[1] The Vienna *Neue Freie Presse* of Oct. 28, 1892, contained the information that "the Vienna Court Opéra alone pays the annual sum of 7000 to 8000 florins in *tantièmes* for Wagner's operas." Now the number of performances of these operas in Vienna is about fifty a year, and almost a thousand in the cities of Germany and Austria. The receipts in Berlin, Munich, Dresden, Hamburg, average at least as high as those in Vienna. Allowing for operas on which copyright has expired and for smaller receipts in smaller cities, the annual profits on Wagner's operas (Bayreuth included) must amount to fully $50,000. A thousand

mon necessities of life, while he was creating these profitable works; his detractors continued even after his death to misrepresent his character and his actions. To take one example out of many. In the preposterous parody of Wagner's life perpetrated a few years ago by Mr. Joseph Bennett (London *Musical Times*) we read in regard to the period at which we have now arrived: "But of practical work, like that by which Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert honestly earned their bread, there is not a syllable, nor apparently a thought. To beg, Wagner was not ashamed." A short recapitulation of facts will enable the reader to judge Mr. Bennett's competence as a veracious biographer. During his conductorship at Madgeburg, Königsberg, Riga, and Dresden, Wagner worked as few Kapellmeisters ever work. In Paris, during his first sojourn, he had tried almost everything but boot-blacking or street-sweeping to make his living; he had been there again recently, trying to find an opening for work, or performances that would help him. He had within a few years written three immortal operas which to-day support thousands of musicians, and which he had reason to hope would support him. He had now in his mind no fewer than *five* projects for new operas, one of which he intended to work out for Paris immediately; he had commenced his Nibelung Trilogy, to which he was soon to devote all his time; he tried to make a little money

dollars a week for the heirs, and ten times that amount for the opera-houses and their employees, while the creator of all this wealth could not even scrape up enough to permit him to compose without being interrupted by the pettiest pecuniary cares. I may add here the significant fact that not one of the malicious reviewers of Wagner's Correspondence, who dwelt so long on his obligations to Liszt, alluded to the fact that he was, on his part, supporting Minna's parents. A curious phenomenon, this hatred of genius by the Philistines!

with concerts and operatic performances in Zürich; he wrote articles for periodicals, and essays, which he sent from publisher to publisher, trying to get respectable terms for them; was it *his* fault that he received only $80 for an essay on which he had been hard at work for four months (*i.e.* at the rate of five dollars a week)? Could he be expected to accept the conductorship of the Zürich Opera for ten dollars a week "at hard labor"? Was he not right in exclaiming (Aug. 7, 1849): "Ah, children, if you only gave me the income of a middling mechanic, you would truly feel joy in the outcome of my undisturbed work, which should belong to you all"?

Details regarding the efforts to support himself at this period are given in the letters to Liszt (Nos. 20, 23, 25, etc.); at the same time he confesses frankly that he is good for nothing except composing operas. If he had been less of an egotist, if he had thought of the greatest good of the greatest number, he would of course have given up music and become a farmer, a merchant, or a hod-carrier. The world would then have lost its greatest music-dramas; but think how the Philistines would have been pleased! and are not the Philistines in the majority? Do not thousands of Philistines make their living by writing essays and articles for periodicals, by the column, which Wagner considered "humiliating" in his own case, even though he got five dollars a week for it? What a contemptible character — to have done nothing but write the *Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*, and then to cry out like a child because he "cannot have everything his own way" (as Mr. Bennett says); *i.e.* because he cannot get money enough for his daily bread while he is anxious to write more operas like them!

The only source of income on which he could count during these years at Zürich was from the sale of the performing rights of his operas to the German theatres — usually a mere pittance.

The large cities, Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Stuttgart, where he might have asked larger sums, were, as we have seen, the last to accept his operas. He knew the reason for this very well: it was because those large cities employed *opera-composing conductors*, who were not pleased at the idea of encountering such a formidable rival on their own premises, and who, when at last compelled by the popularity of these operas in smaller cities to accept them, often did their best to kill them off by means of wretched performances. Poor fellows! They found each of these operas a hydra-headed monster, against whom all mutilations were unavailing.

What princely sums he obtained for the performing rights of his operas may be inferred from the fact that Berlin was scandalized at the very thought of $750 for *Tannhäuser*, and Munich would not listen to such a sum as $500. Hamburg refused to pay $250, while Leipzig found $140 "exorbitant"! Breslau paid about $80; Würzburg gave $37; Cologne could not, for a time, raise $50; and the smaller cities ranged from that sum down to about $25! These payments, of course, were made but once, and in many cases he found it so difficult to get even this one payment that he finally had to invent a scheme for compelling payment in advance by means of a postal arrangement which he called a *Zwangspass*. Bremen tried to dodge all payment by bringing out one of the operas without notifying him at all. Moreover, the operatic "gold-mine" was soon exhausted. In April,

1852, he writes: "The receipts I can count upon are becoming fewer and fewer, — to judge by Leipzig, — and I must deem myself lucky if during this whole year I get something from Weimar for the *Flying Dutchman.*" And in February, 1853, after Berlin had returned his score: —

"Kassel, too, has now demanded the score of *Tannhäuser:* that, I think, ends the matter, and I count on no further theatre. So that I now can overlook my profits from this glorious business: most meagre it is, and I must thank God that the family R. continues to assist me, else I would — after procuring a few very necessary supplies for the house and for personal wear — again be reduced to absolute destitution — thanks to the noble assistance of glorious Germany."

FRIENDS IN NEED

The friend he referred to as R. was Frau Julie Ritter in Dresden, who supplied him every year with a small but regular sum, till the end of 1856, when he dispensed with it. Had it not been for the generosity of this woman and of Franz Liszt, it is quite probable that destitution would have driven him to suicide, which frequently suggested itself to him: at any rate, he would not have been able to write the poem and music of the *Nibelung's Ring;* perhaps he would have followed the plan, which repeatedly suggested itself to him, of going to America to make his fortune. Whether he would have succeeded is doubtful; he certainly did not succeed when he tried, in 1855 and 1860, to make his way in London and Paris. His day had not yet come.

When the contribution from Frau Ritter was exhausted, and nothing else in sight, he appealed to the

large-hearted Liszt, and hardly ever in vain. Unfortunately Liszt had at this time given up his remunerative career as pianist, which had yielded him thousands in one evening, and commenced writing compositions for orchestra, which not only brought him no profit, but actually entailed on him the expense of printing them for the benefit of a world which did not want them. He had accepted the post of conductor at the Weimar Opera, with an annual salary of less than $1000, and was called upon to support his three children and his mother. Yet he usually managed to find something to help out his needy friend, either in his own pocket, or by appealing to some one in Weimar, Vienna, or elsewhere. A few concerts, one might think, would have helped radically; but Liszt was unwilling to play any more, apparently for social reasons connected with his relations to the Weimar Court and his intended marriage. "The concert-career," he writes, "has been closed for me more than two years, and I cannot incautiously enter it again without seriously prejudicing my present position, and especially my future."

Like Rubinstein and other great virtuosi, Liszt threw his money out of the window with both hands while he had plenty of it. During his first triumphal tour through Europe, his mother sent her friend Belloni especially to Paris to see that he did not squander all his earnings. He was the most prodigal of the prodigal race of artists, and at the same time the most generous. One of his historic achievements was his doing the lion's share in earning a sum sufficient to support the deaf and helpless song-composer, Robert Franz, through life; another, the building of the Beethoven Monument at Bonn; and

everybody knows how he devoted several hours almost daily during the last thirty years of his life to teaching pupils, talented and untalented, without ever asking a penny in payment. Yet when the Wagner-Liszt Correspondence appeared, the Philistines raised a tremendous outcry over the revelation that Wagner, when he had no other resource open to him, asked Liszt, a dozen times or so, to send him money.[1]

As a matter of fact, it was the bitterest grief of Liszt's life that he could not send his friend *more* than he did, and the deepest joy of his existence that Wagner had chosen him as his bosom friend and protector.

"It is the task of my life to prove worthy of your friendship," he exclaims in one letter; and in another: "I have declared our maxim to be: that our first and principal duty at Weimar is to give Wagner's operas *selon le bon plaisir de l'auteur.*" Again: "My sympathy for you, and my admiration of your divine genius, are truly too serious and too sincere to allow me ever to take offence at any opinion you may express." "On reading your last letter I wept bitter tears over your tortures and wounds." "Of the close of the Preface to the three opera poems I do not speak.

[1] There is nothing in the history of German journalism more revolting than the tone of many of the criticisms that were written on the appearance of the Wagner-Liszt Correspondence. The same nation that had ignored its Bach, that had kept its Schubert in such poverty that his brother had to pay for his funeral, that had buried its Mozart with half-a-dozen other paupers, in one grave, without even marking it, — this same nation sat and quietly endured the spectacle of journalistic harpies defiling the memory of Richard Wagner with their scurrilous comments. Will the decent Germans ever rise in revolt at this indecent treatment of their men of genius? I fear not. To realize how incredibly brutal German Philistinism is, we should recall the fact that when the government had voted a pension to the poor deaf Robert Franz for his masterly edition of Bach and Handel, a clique was formed against him, which succeeded in getting the pension revoked! Fortunately, the two *Hungarians*, Liszt and Joachim, provided him with the means for keeping the wolf from the door.

It touched me in my heart of hearts, and I wept a manly tear over it." "I cannot say anything else to you than that I am constantly thinking of you, and that I love you with my inmost heart."

When affairs at Weimar began to take an unfavorable turn for Liszt, owing to petty and vulgar intrigues, he wrote that only his interest in Wagner kept him there; in short, he looked on the promotion of Wagner's cause as the chief mission of his life, to which he subordinated even his own creative activity. "How good, how wise, how tender, and patient he is, I know," says the Princess von Wittgenstein in one of the cordial letters to Wagner which are printed with those of her friend Liszt. Dr. Hanslick says of Wagner's letters: —

"There is something positively unmanly, indecorous, in the voluptuous eagerness with which Wagner nurses his own dejection and despair; still more in the way in which he thrusts every despondent mood, every momentary grief, with a thousand thorns into his friend's heart."

This is the Philistine view of the matter. What the genius, Liszt, thought of it, has been shown in the citations just made, and is summed up by the Princess in these words to Wagner: "Your letters afford us such a joy as gold pieces would bring to sufferers accustomed only to blows or to common copper coin. We implore you to bestow this alms on us often, since it does not impoverish you."

We may go a step farther and assert that Liszt's letters in this Correspondence are less interesting than his friend's, chiefly for the very reason that he is less egotistic, and but rarely pours out his griefs and joys into the other's heart. Egotism, in common mortals a

vice, is in the works and letters of men of genius the supreme virtue. Psychology is enriched by every scrap of epistolary information imparted by genius in moments of confidence or excitement. Wagner repeatedly implored Liszt to be less reserved in his personal communications, but Liszt seemed to prefer to make his letters little more than echoes — answers to his questions and commissions, encouragement to work, advice to be diplomatic, to avoid politics, to be courteous to Philistines, etc.; and it is only in the later period that he has also some interesting communications regarding his own compositions. But in one respect Liszt's letters are unique and marvellous: they are a monument to his kindness of heart and self-obliteration in the interest of a friend, such as no other artist has ever reared for himself.

Next to Liszt, Uhlig was the most useful and devoted friend of the exiled composer. We saw in a preceding chapter how this gifted musician had been converted from a scoffer into a friend, and had even given up his own career as composer in order to place himself completely at the service of a man who could write such an opera as *Tannhäuser* and interpret a Beethoven symphony as he did. Uhlig was the first journalistic champion of Wagner, the first Wagnerite. He wrote articles for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* and other papers, of a decidedly radical and fearless nature, as may be inferred from his statement that he considered Liszt's *Prometheus* to be worth more than all Mendelssohn! Wagner frequently suggests a topic to him; advises him on one occasion to drop polemics, on another to treat the enemy only from a humorous point of view. To him he sent advance copies or the manuscript of his essays,

with a view to a discussion of their contents in the press. Uhlig not only attended to all this with the zeal of a convert and enthusiast, but he became Wagner's general commissioner or agent, tending to the sale of scores, to negotiations with theatres (so far as Liszt did not look after that), paying obligations due, raising loans, making alterations, copying, etc. He also made the excellent pianoforte score of *Lohengrin*. Of course, for some of these services, Uhlig, who was as poor as a church-mouse, was paid; but no money could have paid for his patient work in behalf of his exiled friend. Wagner is constantly apologizing in his letters for his incessant calls on Uhlig's good nature; but Uhlig was not only glad but proud of his position, which he insisted on retaining even when his last illness had brought him to death's door. Wagner was persistently urging him to leave Dresden and come and live with him in Switzerland to restore his health. Once Uhlig did scrape up enough money to visit Zürich; but shortly after his return he began to succumb gradually to lung disease. The last letters to him are full of tender solicitude and hygienic advice; Wagner wants him to come and share his home; but on Jan. 3, 1853, he died, and the loss to the world was as great as Wagner's personal loss; for had Uhlig lived ten years longer, we should doubtless have another volume of letters, full of valuable details regarding the most interesting period in Wagner's life — the later years of his exile, during which he wrote his greatest works — most of the *Nibelung's Ring* besides *Tristan and Isolde*. Uhlig has had his reward for his sacrifice and devoted friendship. As a composer, he would have sunk into oblivion long ago; as Wagner's first press

champion and principal correspondent (after Liszt), his name will live forever in musical literature.

After Uhlig's death Fischer became chief commissioner, till he too died, in 1859, at the ripe age of sixty-nine, while Uhlig was, like Schubert, carried away at thirty-one. The personal relations between Wagner and Fischer were as cordial as those with his other friends; but the old chorus-master was something of a Philistine who did not understand the great reformer's ideas fully, nor know how to make allowance for his eccentricities and moods, as Liszt and Uhlig did. Hence Fischer was constantly taking offence at something or other that Wagner said or did, — always ready, however, to forgive, to listen to his explanatory and apologetic pleas. It must be admitted that there are passages in Wagner's letters to most of his friends which it must have taxed their good nature to overlook. He knew this himself better than any one; and on one occasion he wrote to Uhlig: —

"Truly, in our intercourse, if one of us two need to make an apology, it is I once and always. Pay no attention if, now and then, something in my letters vexes you. Unfortunately, I am often in such bitter humor, that *it almost affords me a cruel relief to offend some one;*[1] this is a calamity which only makes *me* the more deserving of pity."

HYGIENE AND GASTRONOMY

Surely the disappointments and annoyances, domestic and artistic, pecuniary and operatic, to which Wagner

[1] The amiable Schumann, in one of his private letters, uses almost the same words that I have here italicized, in describing one of his own occasional moods. George Sand generalizes this trait in the remark that men of genius "are worse to their friends than to their enemies."

was subjected almost daily, are sufficient to account for all the moods discharged in his letters, even those in which his best friends had to serve as lightning rods. But there were other clouds to darken his life and occasion electric discharges of temper: the darkest of these was his ill health, which, as Liszt once suggested to him, was really the source of much of his misery and pessimism. Wagner, in fact, is one more name added to the long list of men of genius who lived to a good old age and accomplished an enormous amount of work although they seldom enjoyed perfect health. We have seen that in his infancy he had a mild attack of the typhoid fever which ravaged Leipzig after the great and decisive battle with the French: this attack may have weakened his system permanently.

He was delicate throughout his childhood, and erysipelas, a disease which harassed him all his life, made its appearance during his schooldays. "Every change in the weather was a trouble to him," says Praeger:—

> "As regards the loss of his eyebrows, an affliction which ever caused him some regret, Wagner attributed it to a violent attack of St. Anthony's fire, as this painful malady is also called. An attack would be preceded by depression of spirits and irritability of temper. Conscious of his growing peevishness, he sought refuge in solitude. As soon as the attack was subdued, his bright animal spirits returned, and none would recognize in the daring little fellow the previous taciturn misanthrope."

The annoyance and torture caused by this disease in later years was sometimes almost past bearing. For instance, in the winter of 1855–6 he had no fewer than *twelve* relapses. "I had foreseen this last attack," he writes to Liszt,

"and had therefore been subjected to constant anxiety and torture during Tichatschek's twelve-day visit; this abominable disease has degraded me deeply: in May alone I had three relapses, and even now hardly an hour passes by in which I do not dread a new eruption. Hence I am not fit for any work, and it is evident that I must seek a radical cure. This calls for a painfully conscientious regulation of my diet and habits of life; the slightest irregularity in stomach or bowels immediately affects my malady. Absolute quiet is called for, avoidance of all excitement, all annoyances, etc., further Karlsbad water, certain warm baths, later cold ones, etc."

What made this pertinacious disease especially unbearable to him was the fact that exposure to the air often brought on a new attack. He was thus compelled to spend weeks at a time indoors, and this, to a man so devoted to fresh air and out-door exercise, was torture indescribable.

Dyspepsia, insomnia, and rheumatic heart-trouble took turns with erysipelas in lowering his vitality. Both the insomnia and the heart-trouble were probably mere sequels of the dyspeptic trouble, which was partly a result of his starvation period in Paris, while partly he was himself to blame. Like so many brain-workers, he maltreated his stomach. He ate too fast, thus making the stomach do work that should have devolved on the teeth. Whenever he was in condition to write he worked too hard, too persistently, and neglected the precaution of leaving off some time before a meal. He probably did not know that this is a frequent cause of dyspepsia among authors; but in a general way he knew that he was misbehaving, physiologically speaking; for in a letter to Frau Ritter[1] he says: —

[1] Langhans's *Geschichte der Musik*, p. 492.

"In composing, I usually work excessively, and also provoke the just indignation of my wife by being late at meals: so that I always begin the second half of the day in a most amiable mood." In a letter to F. Heine he thus sums up the whole matter: "As to my gloomy days, I can the rather keep silence, as they mostly come from overwork and nervous exhaustion; for then I certainly look with an eye of despair on the wretchedness of the present order of things."

Liszt — who had an excellent digestion — he apostrophizes thus: "Provide yourselves, O ye unfortunate men, with good digestions, and suddenly life will present an entirely different aspect from what you, with your gastric trouble, have been able to see!" And he proceeds, with humorous exaggeration, to trace all the evils of politics, diplomacy, vanity, and science to — disordered abdomens.

Ill health devoured a great deal of valuable time and energy that otherwise might have been converted into immortal works of art. Sometimes he could only work two or three hours a day (in place of his former five or six), a few hours of sleep being necessary after this exertion, in order to rest his brain. In September, 1852, he found that even one short hour was all the work he could endure. Theoretical writing was especially fatiguing to him, and after such exertion, "a sharp knife often cuts into my cerebral nerves," he says. So carefully did he have to husband his strength that he rarely permitted himself to write — even letters — in the afternoon or evening. Matters were aggravated whenever that peculiarly disagreeable and depressing warm wind known as the *Föhn* blew, as it often does in Switzerland for weeks at a time. Indeed, Wagner was, like most men of genius,[1] peculiarly susceptible to climatic and atmospheric

[1] See Lombroso's *The Man of Genius.*

influences. Winter was his abomination, and he usually postponed the beginning of a new composition till spring or summer.

The suicidal thoughts which he says visited him frequently were no doubt inspired by a combination of these physiological disturbances with some depressing news relating to his operas. In his sober moments nothing was farther from his thoughts than the notion of ending his life voluntarily. When not urged into imprudent excess by the demon of unrest and the delicious craving for creative work, he formulated a set of hygienic rules which he carefully followed. Unfortunately he had no good medical advice, but tried to diagnose his own malady by reading books. This led him repeatedly to submit to hydropathic treatment; and most heroically did he carry out for weeks at a time such an exacting regimen as this: —

"This is how I spend my day: 1. Early, at half-past five, wrapping up in a wet sheet till seven o'clock; then cold tub and a walk. Eight o'clock, breakfast: dry bread and milk, or water. 2. Again a short walk; then a cold compress. 3. About twelve o'clock, rubbing down with damp towels; a short walk; another compress. Then dinner in my room, to avoid indigestion. An hour's idleness; a stiff walk of two hours — alone. 4. About five o'clock, rubbing down with a wet cloth, and a short walk. 5. About six o'clock a hip-bath, lasting a quarter of an hour, followed by a walk to promote circulation; another compress; supper about seven o'clock; dry bread and water. 6. Then a whist party until nine, after which another compress, and then about ten o'clock to bed. I bear this *régime* very well now; perhaps I shall still increase it."

He soon found that this treatment was altogether too much of a good thing for him, and concluded that — since

he could not afford to go to Paris and put himself in charge of a specialist — careful and long-continued dieting was his best remedy. In July, 1853, he went to St. Moritz in the Engadine to see what the hot springs there, noted as a remedy for dyspepsia, would do for him, combined with an altitude of six thousand feet. The surroundings were grand, but he felt lonely and deserted; glacier expeditions did not, in his then physical condition, agree with him, and the weather was unfavorable, so that he longed to leave, and seek sunny Italy. "Whether this cure has done me any good, the sequel must show," he writes: "on the whole I have no desire to repeat it; I am too restless to give up all activity for so long a time; in short, I am not a man for 'cures' — I can see that now." He was right; had he better understood the art of loafing (mentally), his health would have suffered less, and he would have found it easier to follow Liszt's advice that he should ignore the critics, drink a bottle of good wine, and work his way up to life immortal.

It is almost pathetic to note his childish joy on the occasional days when he felt perfectly well. "My lightness of head and general state of bodily well-being open up to me a new world," he exclaims on one occasion; and on another: —

> "For the last three days my bodily health has so improved, that I often feel in the highest spirits: it is the light healthy blood which is now filling my veins. Besides, fine weather has set in with the new moon. I often feel at times like these as if I were gently and pleasantly intoxicated. Oh! what is all wine intoxication compared with this feeling of most joyful ease, which often has no moral foundation!"

It was one of the maxims of these water-cures that all stimulants — tea, coffee, wine, tobacco, etc. — must be given up. For a while he submitted to this patiently, drinking only water and milk. Before long, however, he found that milk did not agree with him, as it produced acidity of stomach, whereupon he launched out into a terrific tirade against the lacteal fluid, declaring that warm milk is the proper nourishment of infants, but that no animal drinks cold milk, and that to put such milk into the stomach of an adult — especially one whose nerves are in a state of constant activity — simultaneously with meat, is an absurdity. Then he gives this gastronomic formula, which is an excellent one for brain-workers: —

"The right thing for us is — enjoy everything, but within the bounds of moderation, as taught by self-observation and experience. As coffee (generally) is hurtful to my nerves, I take roast meat — preferably game — early in the day, with a draught or two of *good* wine. Your oat meal gruel does not please me: so take game — hare! Game, while providing a maximum of nourishment, requires a minimum of digestive power; and it is imperative for you to gain strength through nourishment."

As regards the use of wine, he expresses strong disapproval of those who are unable to be social without half intoxicating themselves. One time he relates how he has resorted to English cookery, — vegetables boiled in water, and meat roasted on a spit, which his wife had to procure specially, — and then he continues: —

"Last Monday, in honor of our wedding anniversary, my Swiss confederates spent the evening at my house. They boozed, as is their wont; and my disgust at this hard drinking, without which these unfortunate fellows have not a spark of mirth or wit, com-

pletely convinced me of my real cure. I can no longer conceive that anything could happen, or that I could fall into any misfortune, which would make me again have recourse to wine, beer, etc. So I revel in an enjoyment of health of which — as I now consciously feel it — I had no conception."

This was in 1851, but his good health did not last, as we have seen; neither did his resolution to abjure wine; and later on he returned to a sensible maxim expressed on an earlier occasion, that "although it is through water that we become healthy, we *are* not really healthy until we are also able to drink wine in moderation."

Nor could he prevail upon himself to give up the disagreeable habit of taking snuff, to which he was a real slave. In August, 1853, various things had happened to inspire him with a *tœdium vitæ* and suicidal thoughts: "To heal my diseased cerebral nerves, my physician has persuaded me to give up snuff once for all: I have now abstained for six days, and what that implies, none but as passionate a snuff-taker as myself can imagine. I see now that snuff was really the only pleasure which I had 'on and off': now I have to let that go too. My present sufferings are indescribable, but I shall persevere, that's certain. Therefore — no more snuff-boxes: hereafter I shall only accept orders." The playful turn with which this *lamento* is closed is almost as characteristic a trait of Wagner as of Heine.

A few years later we find him again more devoted to snuff than ever. Praeger describes a scene in London (1855) when Wagner sat at the piano, playing from his own scores and Weber's, when he

"abruptly stopped singing, on finding his snuff-box empty, and got into a childish, petty fit of anger. He turned to us in deepest

concern with 'Kein Schnupftabak mehr, also Kein Gesang mehr' (no more snuff, so no more songs); and though we had reached the small hours of early morn, would have some one sent in search of this necessary adjunct."

Praeger says that Wagner did not really care for snuff, but this, as a preceding quotation shows, is absurd. It may be, however, that he "allowed the indelicacy of the habit" and knew that it aggravated his dyspepsia. He was, in a word, a slave to snuff. For smoking he cared less.

LOVE OF NATURE AND TRAVEL

Readers of musical biographies are aware that most of the great composers were passionate lovers of Nature — of the beautiful scenes and the inspiring solitude it offers, far away from the haunts of men. Beethoven confessed that he often preferred the company of a tree to that of a man; many of his best musical ideas came to him on his daily walks, listening to the sounds of Nature, or to the strains evoked spontaneously in his brain. Mozart composed (mentally) always and everywhere, in a stage-coach as easily as in his workroom; but his favorite abode was an open garden-house: here, he said, he could compose more in a day than in a closed room in several days. Weber, like these masters, composed preferably on his solitary walks, and so did Wagner.[1]

There were some exceptions to this rule, among whom Berlioz may be named, who confessed that he could not "sketch the moon except in looking at its image reflected in a well." To Wagner, he wrote, in 1855: "So you are about to melt the glaciers by composing your *Nibelungen!*

[1] Details on these habits of the great composers are collected in my *Chopin, and Other Musical Essays* ("How Composers Work").

. . . That must be superb, to write thus in presence of a grand nature!"

So Wagner thought, and his great and constant desire while in Switzerland was to have a house of his own overlooking a lake, with the mountains beyond. This desire was not an outcome of mere love of luxury and elegance, but an instinctive craving for the scenic splendors and cool breezes which stimulate artistic creation. Not that he did not also have, like most artists, a great craving for luxury: he was, in fact, inclined to epicurism, even sybaritism, and the greatest marvel about him is that, with such a disposition, he should have chosen, in devotion to his art-ideal, a life of debt and privation, when he might have revelled in wealth and luxury if he had only been willing to write more operas *à la* Meyerbeer, like *Rienzi*. He speaks, in one of his letters to Liszt of the *Verschwendungsteufel*, or demon of extravagance, which took possession of him in furnishing a house beyond his means. In another, dated Nov. 16, 1853, he explains that the uncertainty of his operatic income and the sanguine habit of hoping for more than he actually gets leads him to spend more than he has; and he confesses his "doubtless censurable habit of leading a somewhat more comfortable life than in the last few years." But these extravagances were confined to very narrow limits by the smallness of his income; and the only times when they reached a more considerable sum were on the occasions when he indulged his passion for travel, to see the natural beauties of Switzerland and Italy. Surely it would be most uncharitable to chide the poor, ill, hard-working composer, whose every fibre craved rest and recreation, for indulging his taste for domestic comfort

and once in a while that for travel, even if he had to do so at the expense of the willing Liszt.

"Oh if I only could for once make a pleasant journey this summer!" he exclaims in April, 1852: "If I only knew how to go about it. . . . This yearning for travel is so intense in me that it has already inspired me with the thought of a burglarious and murderous attack on Rothschild & Co."[1] On another occasion, two months before his fortieth birthday, when all his schemes seemed to fail, and he was tormented by sleepless nights, he wrote that he *must* have a change in his life: —

"I shall try to get *money*, in every conceivable way: I shall borrow and — steal — if necessary, in order to get the means to *travel*. The more beautiful part of Italy is closed to me (as long as I am not amnestied); hence I shall go to Spain, to Andalusia, shall seek companions — and try once more to live, as well as I may. I should like to make a trip around the world! If I fail to get *money* — or — if this trip also fails to put fresh breath into my life — then — there is an end, and sooner will I commit suicide than continue to live in this way."

From his home in Zürich he made frequent short excursions into the Alps and among the glaciers; the brief descriptions of these trips he gives to his friends show that mountains were as much a passion to him as to Byron. In July, 1852, Liszt had sent him $80 as honorarium for the *Dutchman* at Weimar: "This I am now spending in travelling. Every day costs me a number of the opera."

[1] This sentence and the following one, strange to say, have escaped the attention of Mr. Joseph Bennett, who might have easily proved from these self-confessions that Wagner was a potential thief and murderer, who only needed an opportunity to carry out the black designs of his villanous soul.

"I have now been travelling for six days: I can count each day by my treasury, for each one costs me regularly a twenty-franc piece. It is splendid here, and in thought I have travelled much with you. Yesterday I descended from the Faulhorn (8261 feet). There I had a grand and awe-inspiring view of the mountain, ice, snow, and glacier-world of the Bernese Oberland, which lies straight before one, as though one could touch it with one's hands."

He adds that he walks well and is sound on his legs; but his brain is too excited, and he never has true rest, but only lassitude. Yet

"no cure in the world is of any avail where only one thing would help — viz., if I were different from what I am. The real cause of my sorrow lies in my exceptional position towards the world and towards my surroundings, which can no longer give me any joy; everything for me is martyrdom and pain — and insufficiency."

A touch of Schopenhauer follows this diagnosis of his discontent: —

"Again, on this journey, amidst wonderful nature, have the human rabble annoyed me: I must continually draw back from them in disgust, and yet — I so long after human beings; — but this pack of lubbers! Fie upon them! There are magnificent women here in the Oberland, but only so to the eye; they are all tainted with rabid vulgarity."

One more short passage may here be quoted by way of illustrating Wagner's literary art whenever he is not hampered by metaphysical stilts: an account of a two days' trip over the Gries glacier from Wallis, through the Formazza valley, to Domodossola: —

"The Gries is a magnificently wild glacier pass, a very dangerous one, and traversed at rare intervals by people from the Hasli Valley or Wallis, who bring southern goods (rice, etc.) from the Italian valleys. For the first time on my journey there was mist

on the glacier heights (over 8000 feet), so that my guide had difficulty in finding a path over the cold walls of snow and rock. But the descent! leading down gradually from the most gruesome ice-regions, through many a sloping valley, through all the ranges of vegetation of northern Europe, into the rank luxuriance of Italy! I was quite intoxicated, and laughed like a child, as I passed out of chestnut groves through meadows and even cornfields, completely covered with vine trellises (for that is how the vine is generally cultivated in Italy), so that I often wandered under a covering of vine similar to our verandas, only extended over whole acres, on which, again, everything grows that the soil can produce. And then the ever-enchanting variety in the forms of mountains and valleys, with the most delightful cultivation, charming stone houses, and — all through the valley — a fine race of men. Well, I cannot describe it all, but I promise you to go again over the Gries glacier with you. . . . In the evening I drove in a retour-coach from Domodossola to Baveno on Lago Maggiore: this trip was the crowning glory; I was in an ecstatic frame of mind when at last I passed from wild grandeur to picturesque loveliness."

At this place he sent for his wife, and with her continued his journey to Chamonix and Geneva. He had, for years, wished to see Italy, with the longing of a Goethe — especially Naples, which for political reasons was inaccessible to him as long as he was an outlaw. "If I lived in Naples or Andalusia, or on one of the Antilles," he wrote to Liszt, "I would write much more poetry and music than in our gray nebulous climate, which always disposes us only to abstract speculation." This, of course, was a winter mood; in spring and summer he knew full well that the Swiss climate is an unequalled brain-tonic and thought-stimulator, and I am convinced that if Fate had ordered him to live elsewhere than among the bracing Swiss breezes, there would be less vigor, originality, and freshness in his *Nibelung*, *Tristan*, and *Meistersinger* scores.

COMPOSITION OF RHEINGOLD

In September, 1853, he made another much less pleasant trip to Northern Italy, the account of which he summed up to Liszt in half-a-dozen lines: —

"In Geneva I became ill, felt with alarm my solitariness, endeavored, however, to force the Italian trip and went to Spezia; the indisposition increased; enjoyment was out of the question: so I returned (to Zürich) — to die or — to compose — one or the other: nothing else was left for me to do. There you have my whole travel story — *my* 'Italian Trip.'"

In a public letter to the Italian composer, Arrigo Boito, written in 1871, when *Lohengrin* was being produced in Bologna, he again refers to this trip and its connection with *Rheingold.*

"Be it a demon or a genius that oft rules us in decisive moments — enough: one night, when I was lying sleepless in a tavern at La Spezia, the inspiration to my *Rheingold* music came over me; and forthwith I returned to my melancholy home to begin my over-long work, the fate of which now, more than anything else, chains me to Germany."

By this we must not understand that the musical themes for the *Rheingold* poem now came to his mind for the first time; for, as we shall see in a later chapter, he usually conceived his musical motives simultaneously with the writing of his poems. The passage simply means that he settled in his mind that the composition of *Rheingold* was to be his next task. He had hoped that before commencing this score he might have the privilege of hearing his *Lohengrin.* "I *must* hear *Lohengrin* once: I cannot and will not write any more music before I have

heard that opera." This sentiment recurs again and again in his letters. Several times he was on the point of going to Germany in disguise to realize his wish; had projects for settling in Paris in order to get a chance to hear at least some fragments; and at last succeeded in getting together an orchestra for a sort of Wagner festival in Zürich for this special purpose. But that was all he succeeded in doing in this direction. Had he kept to his original intention of not composing again before he had heard *Lohengrin*, *Rheingold* would have had to wait till 1859, when for the first time he heard that opera in Vienna. By that time, however, he had already completed *Rheingold*, *Walküre*, half of *Siegfried*, and the whole of *Tristan!* In his "Epilogue on the Circumstances and Events which Accompanied the Execution of the Stage-Festival-Play, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, up to the Date of the Publication of the Poem" (Vol. V. 377) he sums up this matter concisely: —

"With great elation of spirit I began, after five years' interruption of my musical productivity, to carry out the composition of *Rheingold*, toward the close of the year 1853. . . . The peculiar atmospheric freshness of my task, like bracing mountain air, carried me without fatigue through all the difficulties of my work, which in the spring of 1857 had got so far advanced as to include *Rheingold*, *Walküre*, and a great portion of *Siegfried*."

It is odd that here, as in his letters, Wagner should speak of a *five* years' interruption of his composition, when in fact more than *six* years elapsed between the two operas in question. *Lohengrin* was completed on Aug. 28, 1847,[1] while it was not till October, 1853, that

[1] The instrumentation, it is true, was not completed till the following spring.

he wrote to Liszt: "To-day *Rheingold* coursed through my veins: if it must be, and if it cannot be otherwise, you shall presently have a work of art which will give you — JOY(?)!" Six months before, he had already expressed his confidence in the *Nibelung* music in these words: "Only let me once throw everything else aside in order to dive once more into the fountain of music, and there shall be created sounds that will make the people hear what they cannot see."

On Dec. 17 he writes again: —

"I am spinning myself in like a silk-worm; but also from within myself am I spinning. Five years I have written no music. Now I am in the Nibelheim: to-day Mime tells his woes. Unluckily I had a bad cold last month, which made me interrupt my work for ten days, else I would have finished the sketch of the whole score before the end of the year. . . . However, it must be finished by the end of January."

He kept his word; for on Jan. 15, 1854, he writes to Liszt: —

"Well, *Rheingold* is done — more so than I expected. With what faith, with what joy, I began this music! In a real frenzy of despair I have at last continued and completed it: alas, how I too was walled in by the need of gold! Believe me, no one has ever composed like this; I fancy my music is fearful; it is a pit of terrors and grandeurs. Soon I shall make a clear copy, — black on white, — and that, in all probability, will be the end of it. Or shall I perhaps allow it also to be performed at Leipzig for twenty louis d'or? . . . *You are the only one* whom I have told about this. No one else suspects it, least of all those who are about me."

Shortly afterwards Heine was informed that *Rheingold* had been commenced early in November: "I got so enthusiastic over it that until it was finished I had neither

ears nor eyes for anything else." In April he wrote to Liszt that he was at work on the instrumentation, and that by May everything would be finished — in pencil sketches, which would require copying. On May 27, to Fischer: "In these last days I have once more, after a long interval, finished a score (*Rheingold*): my fanatic interest in my work was towards the end so great that I postponed all letter-writing to its completion."

Hardly was *Rheingold* completed when *Die Walküre* was begun.[1] In August, 1854, he was already hard at work on the sketch of the score. In October he sent the *Rheingold* score to Liszt, with the information that he had got into the second act of the *Walküre;* in December the sketch was finished, and the following February, 1855, he had about completed the scoring of Act I., when his work suffered a long and serious interruption by his four months' absence to conduct a season of Philharmonic Concerts in London. We must therefore postpone further details regarding that drama till we have described that event, which forms one of the most interesting episodes in his life. Before passing on to it we must, however, speak of another important composition written, or rather rewritten, a few months before the journey to London, besides considering Wagner's merits as a conductor, by way of prelude to his London conductorship.

A FAUST OVERTURE

It will be remembered that he wrote a concert piece, which he called an *Overture to Goethe's Faust,* in the winter of 1839–40, in Paris, in the midst of his struggles

[1] He actually postponed the copying of his pencil-sketch of *Rheingold* in his eagerness to commence the new drama.

to earn his bread and to win recognition as a composer. It had been really intended, as he explained some years later, to form the first movement of a grand Faust symphony. It was rehearsed for a Conservatoire concert, but not performed, because the directors concluded after the rehearsal that it was too enigmatic. In Dresden it was performed in July and August, 1844, but met with a very cold reception by the public and critics. Regarding this result Roeckel wrote to Praeger: —

"This is not to be wondered at; for in the judgment of some here it compares favorably with the grandest efforts of Beethoven. Such a work ought to be heard several times before its beauties can be fully appreciated."

In 1852, Liszt brought out this overture at Weimar, and Wagner wrote to thank him for it, adding: —

"I cannot feel indifferent to this composition, even if there are many details in it which would not flow from my pen to-day: what especially suits me no longer is the somewhat too frequent use of brass.[1] If I knew that Härtel would give me a handsome sum for it, I should almost feel inclined to publish the score with a version for the pianoforte, only I need to be urged; for, of my own impulse, I do not like to undertake such a thing."

The plan seemed to take hold of his mind; for, not long after this, he begged Liszt to send him the score with a view to its revision and publication. Liszt immediately forwarded it, and, with apologies, made a few suggestions (Letters, No. 86) as to how it might be improved, especially by the addition of a tender Gretchen melody. Wagner replied that he was "truly delighted" with his friend's suggestion, and complimented him on his saga-

[1] The overture was written about the time when the brassy *Rienzi* was completed.

city in having felt that there was something mendacious about a piece which pretended to be an overture to Goethe's *Faust* and in which woman is absent:—

"But perhaps you would immediately comprehend my tone-poem if I named it *Faust in Solitude.* When I composed it I intended to write a complete Faust symphony; the first movement (actually written) was simply this *Solitary Faust,* in his longing, despair, and cursing; the 'womanly' only hovers over his fancy as a figment of his desire, but not in its divine reality: and this insufficient image of his longing is precisely what he demolishes in despair. It was to be left for the second movement to bring forward Gretchen — the woman. I had the theme for it already, but it remained a mere theme — the matter was dropped. — I wrote my *Flying Dutchman.* There you have the whole explanation. If now — from motives of vanity and weakness — I am unwilling to let this composition perish entirely, I must indeed work it over — but only as to the *instrumentative Modulation;* the theme which you desire cannot possibly be introduced now; that would make it an entirely new composition, which I have no desire to undertake. But if I publish it, I shall give it the correct title: *Faust in Solitude,* or *Solitary Faust,* a tone-poem for orchestra."

In his reply Liszt said that Härtels would gladly undertake the publication of the overture, and once more suggested that in any case the original manuscript would gain by further elaboration. "If you wish to give me a pleasure," he adds, "make me a present of the manuscript, when it is no longer needed by the printer. This overture has been so long with me, and I have become greatly attached to it!" This was toward the end of the year 1852; and there the matter rested till Jan. 19, 1855, when Wagner again wrote, after hearing that Liszt had in the meantime written his *Faust Symphony:* "Absurdly enough, I have been seized just now by a vivid desire to work over my old Faust overture again: I have com-

posed an entirely new score, have written the instrumentation anew throughout, made some radical changes, also given more elaboration and significance to the middle (second motive). In a few days I shall produce it at a local concert [Zürich] under the name of *A Faust Overture.*

'MOTTO.

'Der Gott der mir im Busen wohnt,
Kann tief mein Innerstes erregen;
Der über allen meinen Kräften thront
Er kann nach aussen nichts bewegen;
Und so ist mir das Dasein eine Last,
Der Tod erwünscht, das Leben mir verhasst!'

In no case shall I publish it." A few weeks later Liszt received a copy of the score, which Wagner was afraid would appear to him very insignificant by the side of his own *Faust Symphony;* and he explained once more that of Gretchen there could be no question, but always only of Faust.

The intention not to publish the score was of course not kept. Liszt sent it to Härtel, who offered twenty louis d'or ($80) for it, which Wagner accepted, as he happened to be in need of funds in London, and did not like to ask the directors of the Philharmonic Society to pay his salary in advance. His request that the publishers should change their offer from twenty louis d'or to twenty pounds sterling was not granted. But Liszt delighted him with this assurance: "The changes which you have made in the *Faust Overture* are splendid, and have decidedly improved the work."

The critics of course did not like the *Faust Overture,* which was beyond their comprehension. Some of them

condemned it as "programme music" *à la* Berlioz, after finding in it all sorts of Mephistophelean and Gretchen motives which the composer had never dreamt of. Dr. Hanslick, with his usual keen insight and vituperative vigor, found in it nothing but "an impotence which, in spite of its boastful extravagance, arouses genuine pity." Among men of genius, on the other hand, Liszt was not alone in discerning at once the beauty and grandeur of a piece which Moscheles praised, and for which in our day even the conservative and disappointed Rubinstein, with all his jealous hatred of triumphant Wagner, has confessed his admiration. In 1860, Dr. Hans von Bülow, who is universally admitted to be the greatest interpreter of Beethoven and, in general, the greatest living authority as to the *intellectual* interpretation of the classical composers, wrote a pamphlet of thirty-one pages[1] containing a poetic and technical analysis of this tone-poem, some of the most important points in which may here be noted. He points out that the composition in question is not a *dramatic* overture (like Beethoven's *Coriolanus*) nor a character-sketch, but an embodiment of a mood — *ein Stimmungsgemälde*, — for which Liszt's happily invented term of "symphonic poem" might be used; and he proceeds to explain how a piece originally intended as the first movement of a symphony could be designated an "overture." Then he notes the fact that "its subject (poetic content) is *suffering*, — not the personal suffering of a certain Faust, but sorrows of general human import. The hero therefore is not Goethe's Faust, but humanity itself." The reader knows that the

[1] *Ueber Richard Wagner's Faust-Overture. Eine erläuternde Mittheilung an die Dirigenten, Spieler und Hörer dieses Werkes.* Leipzig: F. Kahnt, 1860.

Faust Overture was written in Paris, under the influence of a magnificent performance at the Conservatoire of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Between this work and Wagner's overture, Bülow discovers an emotional resemblance, and he adds this further detail: —

"During his residence in Paris, at the time when the *Faust Overture* originated, Wagner copied for himself the score of the Ninth Symphony, which, note for note, remained so indelibly impressed in his memory that he was able, in 1846, when, after a long pause, the Ninth Symphony was, thanks to his efforts, brought again before the Dresden public as practically a novelty, to *conduct all the rehearsals from memory.*"

When we consider that in his *Nibelung* dramas Wagner opened up to us a new world of orchestral coloring, compared with which even the beauties of *Lohengrin* lose some of their lustre; and when we consider that the *Faust Overture* was written at the same time as the second of these dramas, — *Die Walküre,* — we find it perfectly natural that Bülow should have exclaimed that this overture constitutes "a complete practical course in instrumentation"; what we marvel at, and what future generations will marvel at more and more, is that the professional critics and other "experts" did not at once recognize the exquisite orchestral and harmonic novelties in the *Faust Overture,* and that its reception at first almost everywhere amounted to a fiasco.

Doubtless the most ludicrous of all the charges ever brought against Wagner — and it has been brought time and again — is that he wrote music-dramas because he was unable to master the symphonic form sufficiently to write satisfactory concert pieces. Apart from the fact that in his early youth he wrote a symphony of per-

fectly correct form, the woful ridiculousness of this charge is brought out by the fact that any talented conservatory pupil can be taught to write a "correct" symphony. Third-rate composers like Lachner, Pleyel, Macfarren, wrote "correct" symphonies by the dozen. It is interesting to hear what Bülow, the great authority on classical form, has to say on this topic: —

"It is not possible to compose with more perfect organic unity of form than Wagner has done in the *Faust Overture*. Place any 'classical' overture with an 'Introduction' by its side, and see if Wagner's tone-poem does not throw it into the shade even formally." And as for the content, he exclaims that "not only tonal, but general emotional life courses through every vein of its form. Every note is written with a poet's blood."

Finally I will quote a passage from Bülow's pamphlet which cannot be too much commended to critics and amateurs: —

"The new musical forms of Wagner escaped notice for the reason that they were new and, as it were, too colossal. We allude here not so much to the finished art of the second finale of *Tannhäuser*, to which even Professor Bischoff did justice,[1] as rather, for example, to the first act of *Lohengrin*. Is not that a dramatic symphony cast in one mould, perfect in form? The poet here imposed upon the composer the necessity of erecting a tonal structure, to which, IN REGARD TO BROADNESS OF DEVELOPMENT AND IMMENSITY OF CLIMAX, NO PROTOTYPE EXISTED. If you will conscientiously study this part in its main features, you will be unable to deny that Wagner has created here, specifically in regard to *form*, something absolutely new, an artistic whole, built up without any leaning on predecessors."

[1] What generous condescension on the part of so great a man! "Who was Professor Bischoff," did you say? Why, he was — well, he is *now* known as the man who invented the term "music of the future" in derision of Wagner's *Art-Work of the Future*. In his day he was a much-feared musical critic.

When Bülow wrote this, *Lohengrin* was the latest and most mature of Wagner's operas. But if the above is true of *Lohengrin*, — and to-day no one would be so foolish as to deny it, — what shall we say to the amazing formal mastery shown in the last act of the *Götterdämmerung*?

With that in mind, I, for my part, do not hesitate to say that this overwhelming climax, in which all the motives of the whole Tetralogy are woven into a web of wondrous complexity yet perfect perspicuity, makes Beethoven's form seem mere child's play in comparison, and surpasses even the polyphonic ingenuity of Bach's genius.[1]

[1] It takes some courage to make such an assertion to-day; but I have no fear. The history of music has shown, during the last half-century, that those were always nearest the truth who were most daring in their admiration of Wagner's genius.

WAS WAGNER A GREAT CONDUCTOR?

THE *Faust Overture*, like the *Siegfried Idyl* and various operatic overtures and preludes, shows what Wagner might have accomplished as a composer for the concert-hall had not his poetic endowment craved as intensely for expression as his musical genius, thus urging him with every fibre into the music-*drama*. More wisely than some other composers, he recognized his true sphere at an early period, and limited his efforts almost exclusively to that. He knew that he was primarily a great dramatic composer, and it was only when creating music-dramas that he was thoroughly happy and contented; here his revolutionary mind could have everything its own way, and *all* his mental powers were called into healthful and pleasurable activity; whereas in writing concert pieces his poetic faculty would lie dormant; and if he tried any practical work, — such as conducting, — the doings of many of the executing artists, and the general inadequacy of means, fell so far short of his ideals that he suffered indescribable tortures — tortures which were increased if the bâton was wielded by another, less competent conductor, in his presence. Hence, in course of time, he conceived a great aversion to all practical connection with the stage, while yet feeling that his presence was imperatively called for if correct interpretations were to be obtained.

This sensitiveness in regard to inadequate performances was of course not a unique trait of Wagner's, but is characteristic of all great artists. Berlioz, for example, wrote: —

"It is excessively painful for me to hear the greater part of my compositions played under any direction other than my own. I almost had a fit while listening to my overture to *King Lear* in Prague, conducted by a Kapellmeister whose talent is yet undoubted. It is conceivable what I suffered from even the involuntary blunders of Habeneck during the long assassination[1] of my opera *Benvenuto Cellini* at rehearsals."

Similarly, Beethoven wrote, when they were rehearsing his *Fidelio* in Vienna: —

"Pray try to persuade Seyfried to conduct my opera to-day, as I wish to see and hear it from a distance; in this way my patience will at least not be so severely tried by the rehearsal as when I am close enough to hear my music so bungled. I really believe it is done on purpose. Of the wind I will say nothing, but —. All *pp.*, *cresc.*, all *decresc.*, and all *f.*, *ff.*, may as well be struck out of my music, since not one of them is attended to. I lose all desire to write anything more if my music is to be so played."

Judge from such confessions whether Wagner exaggerated when he exclaimed that he often suffered "all the tortures of Dante's inferno" with reference to the performances of his operas.

A THOROUGH DRILL-MASTER

It does not follow by any means that because a composer suffers from poor performances of his works, and knows exactly how they ought to be interpreted, he will

[1] But Berlioz had no pity for Wagner at the "assassination" of *Tannhäuser* by Dietsch at the Opéra in 1861.

for that reason make a first-rate conductor even of his own works, any more than it follows that a great poet must necessarily be a good reader of his verses or those of others. Some of the greatest composers were but indifferent conductors, nervousness, preoccupation, or diffidence making them poor commanders of a large force of obstreperous singers and players. As a rule it will be found that operatic or dramatic composers are better conductors than the writers of concert music, probably because dramatic composition is more directly allied to action. We should therefore naturally expect Wagner to have been one of the greatest conductors of all times, and this supposition is borne out by all the documents.

Just as there are two classes of pianists, one of which is perfect in technical execution, but on the side of interpretation and expression is subject to the charge of monotony, coldness, or arbitrariness, while the other class is less perfect technically, but appeals more forcibly to the emotions; so there are two kinds of conductors, perfect drill-masters on one side, who appeal primarily to the intellect by their precision and accuracy, while on the other hand we have those whose mission is to sway the emotions. To which of these two classes did Wagner belong? The accounts given in earlier chapters of his conducting at Magdeburg, Riga, and Dresden, both in the opera-house and concert-hall, show that he united the merits of both classes. As we are now approaching the period when, for the first and only time in his life, he accepted a special post as conductor of concerts (in London), this is the proper place for considering his fitness for such a position more closely.

That he was a wonderful drill-master, his most rabid opponents never denied. The great Moritz Hauptmann, for example, who immortalized himself by the prediction that "not one note of Wagner's music will survive him," calls attention to his talent as a *regisseur:* "He arranges everything on the stage, down to the smallest details, and all with tact and ingenuity. — He seems to me rather an artist of a thousand faculties (*Tausendkünstler*) than of one."

In accomplishing such results in concert-hall or opera-houses as have been described in the preceding chapters, he spared neither singers nor players. But he himself worked hardest of all, so hard that whenever, later in life, he had brought a work on the stage to his satisfaction, he always suffered from nervous prostration for weeks. No trouble was considered too great; he would even take individual members of an orchestra and drill them till they could play their part with proper expression. Thus, writing to Uhlig (No. 56) about a concert in Zürich, he says: "The *Egmont entr'acte* I had practised with the oboist in my own room, as if he were a singer: the fellow could not contain himself for joy at what he at last produced." With the singers he was of course always ready to go through such a performance.

After assigning the parts of a new opera, the first thing Wagner did — and it seems strange that no one before him should have thought of such a seemingly essential thing — was to have all the singers meet for a "reading rehearsal," each artist reading his or her rôle, while he himself (or the stage-manager), score in hand, pointed out the relation of the verses to the music and the scenic situation. Then, in rehearsing their rôles at

home, the singers had the initial advantage of seeing every song in its proper dramatic and scenic relation. As regards the orchestra, he worked hard not only to secure mechanical precision, but also to attain proper acoustic effects by a new arrangement of the players. Roeckel alludes to this point in one of his Dresden letters to Praeger: —

"He deemed it advisable to rearrange the seating of his band; but oh! the hubbub it has produced is dreadful. 'What! change that which has satisfied Morlacchi and Reissiger?' They charge Wagner with want of reverence for tradition and with taking delight in upsetting the established order of things."

That *is* apt to be a trait of reformers — fortunately for the cause of progress.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

In one of his letters to Liszt from London, Wagner exclaims: "Odd was the confession made to me by Mendelssohnites, that they had never heard such a good performance of the *Hebrides* overture, or understood it so well, as when it was given under my direction." This, however, was rather exceptional. While acknowledging that he was a good drill-master, and that he had endeavored to bring out the good points of even the flimsiest Italian or French operas, the pedantic critics insisted that in his interpretation of the classics he violated the traditions. To expose the hollowness and hypocritical offensiveness of this pretence, we need only consider for a moment the treatment accorded to these great masters by their contemporaries, who are supposed to have handed down these "traditions." The contemporaries of Bach

(born 1685) so far from collecting "traditions," had not a shadow of an idea as to what a giant was living among them. Very few of his pieces were printed during his lifetime (some by his own hand); the greatest of them were practically unknown till half a century ago, and the others have been printed for the first time within the last few years. "Traditions," indeed! With Mozart, of course, it was otherwise. So anxious were the Viennese musicians to preserve all the "traditions" they could possibly get hold of, that they allowed a coterie of jealous Italians to maltreat his *Figaro* so badly that when he had written his next opera, *Don Juan*, he took it to Prague for the first performance, in order to save it from a similar fate in Vienna. Schubert, the divinest dispenser of melody the world has ever seen, wrote two symphonies which have never been excelled in all the essentials of music — original melody, harmony, rhythm, and instrumentation. One of these symphonies the Viennese musicians allowed to lie in a heap of manuscripts for ten years after Schubert's death, till Schumann came down from Leipzig and gave it to an astonished world as an absolute novelty. "Traditions," indeed! Even Beethoven, who had some recognition while he lived, usually had to put up with the most shamefully inadequate means for bringing out his great symphonies; and as he was deaf during the last twenty-five years of his life, he could not properly interpret his works and thus establish "traditions." When he still did conduct, — *e.g.* when he brought out his *Eroica* Symphony, — there was no wild demand for "traditions," as may be inferred from the criticisms quoted in Thayer's Beethoven biography (II. 275), one of which concludes with the information that —

"To the public the symphony seemed too difficult, too long, and Beethoven himself too impolite, since he did not nod even to those who did applaud. Beethoven, himself, on the contrary, found that the applause was insufficient."

Some time after Beethoven's death, when Wagner returned from his trip to Vienna, he found that so eminent a conductor as Dionys Weber in Prague still regarded the Third Symphony as a monstrosity (*Unding*), and we have seen how dissatisfied the youthful Richard was with the German performance of the Ninth Symphony, how he had to actually force it on the Dresdeners, half a century ago, and how he worked constantly with pen and bâton to elucidate the works of Mozart and Beethoven, Gluck and Weber. But he violated the "traditions"! The fact that his musical instinct had led him to scent an error in the current interpretation of Gluck's *Iphiginia in Aulis* overture, which had escaped even Mozart's genius,[1] alone ought to have opened the eyes of the critics.

An anecdote related by Wagner himself, in his essay *On Conducting*, shows how he "violated the traditions" in regard to another great master, Weber:—

"Eighteen years after Weber's death, when I conducted his *Freischütz* for the first time in Dresden, and on this occasion, regardless of the usage observed by my colleague Reissiger, also took the *tempo* of the opening bars of the overture according to my notions, a veteran of Weber's time, the old violoncellist Dotzauer, turned to me with a serious mien, and said: 'Yes, that is the way Weber took it; I now hear it correctly again, for the first time.' On the part of Weber's widow, who was still living in Dresden, this proof of my correct feeling for the music of her long-

[1] See the essay on this overture in Vol. V. of the *Gesammelte Schriften*.

deceased husband, gave rise to truly cordial wishes for my prosperous continuance in the post of Dresden conductor, because, as she said, she could now take up again the hope, so long given up, to her grief, that his music would once more be correctly performed in Dresden. I produce this eloquent and agreeable testimony on this occasion, because in opposition to diverse other ways of judging my artistic activity as conductor, it affords me a pleasant reminiscence."

On a later occasion he taught the Viennese orchestra how to play the *Freischütz* overture in his (that is, Weber's) way; the effect was startling: many declared they had now for the first time heard this piece which constant repetition had long ago rendered threadbare. And although such a result was not specially complimentary to the conductors who had so long misinterpreted this piece, Kapellmeister Dessoff had the good sense, when the opera was given again, to turn to his musicians and say, with a smile: "Well, gentlemen, let us then take the overture *à la* Wagner." Upon which Wagner comments: "Yes, yes, *à la* Wagner! I believe, gentlemen, that many other things might be taken *à la* Wagner without harm."[1]

He held the average operatic and concert-conductor of his day in supreme contempt, and for very good reasons. Most of them were simply orchestral players who had advanced to their important position without having any other conception of their duty than that of time-beaters. That a conductor should understand every orchestral instrument, be well versed in musical history, and in all styles of music; that he should have travelled, so as to

[1] For Wagner's views as to the proper reading of the *Freischütz* overture, the *Meistersinger* prelude, and the Fifth and Eighth symphonies, see the essay *On Conducting*.

be able to put national spirit into his readings; that, besides, he should be a man of general culture, — these were conditions rarely met with at that time. Outside of their narrow specialty, musicians were mostly ignorant fellows, and their social position was a low one. In Austria, Haydn and Mozart were treated little better than lackeys; in England, when Weber visited London, the artists were separated from the guests by a cord stretched across the room. Beethoven was a boor in conduct, yet this was pardoned in society, as nothing more was expected of a musician. When the composer Marschner found Wagner exerting himself in Dresden to give his musicians a more intellectual interest in their art, he dissuaded him, remarking that the musicians were absolutely incapable of understanding him (VIII. 383). But Marschner was mistaken; for Wagner constantly showed how the minds of these players could be aroused by his words; and we know what marvellous results followed.

The first and most important qualification for a conductor is, according to Wagner, that he should have a correct sense of *tempo:* his choice of that shows us at once whether he has understood the composer or not. How lamentably his own operas were bungled by incompetent time-beaters, may be inferred from two instances referred to by himself: on one occasion *Rheingold,* which should last two hours and a half, was dragged out to three hours; on another, the *Tannhäuser* overture, which, under the composer's direction in Dresden, took twelve minutes, was made to last twenty! Other composers fared no better at the hands of these mechanical time-beaters. His impatience with them is illustrated by two anecdotes related by Lesimple. One evening at

Cologne Wagner attended a performance of the *Magic Flute*, one of his favorite operas. After the first act he hastily left the theatre, exclaiming angrily: "Such a miserable wretch of a conductor I have never come across in all my life!" On another occasion he related this incident to Lesimple: "On the Dresden bridge I met Reissiger one evening at *nine o'clock*. Astonished, I asked him, 'But, my dear colleague, have you no opera to conduct to-night?' '*Have conducted it*,' was his reply — '*Masaniello* already ended.'" He had, like a barrel-organ man, ground out the opera as quickly as possible, the sooner to get to his beer.

When conductors of national reputation behaved in such a way, what use was there in putting tempo marks on compositions? Bach was wise, he exclaims, in leaving his compositions mostly unprovided with such marks: he probably reasoned that a musician who could not divine their tempo would not be likely to play them correctly anyway. In regard to his own operas, Wagner tells us that he supplied the earlier ones very carefully and minutely with tempo marks and metronomic figures; but this did not prevent them from being bungled, for the conductors had no conception of what is the very essence of his music — A CONSTANT MODIFICATION OF TEMPO.

This constant modification of tempo is, in his opinion, the essence not only of his own music, but of Beethoven's; it is, in fact, the "vital principle of our music in general"; neglect of it is as fatal as playing the wrong notes. How much the efficacy of his music depends on it may be inferred from the fact related by him that when he himself conducted the *Meistersinger* overture in Leipzig, it was redemanded, while at its repetition, some

time later, by the same orchestra, but with a metronomic conductor, it was hissed.[1]

Wagner intimates that the metronomic conductors would have long since killed off Beethoven's symphonies, if these works were capable of being killed; they continued to live because amateurs of taste could play them at home on the piano. That he was right in insisting that a free modification of tempo is almost as essential in Beethoven's works as in his own we know, because this was Beethoven's own way of conducting or playing. Schindler says: —

"Almost everything that I heard Beethoven interpret was free from all (metronomic) rigidity of tempo; it was a *tempo rubato* in the properest sense of the words, as conditioned by content and situation. . . . It was the most distinct and vivid declamation."

To-day the leading orchestral conductors — such men as Hans Richter, Anton Seidl, Felix Mottl, Richard Strauss, Arthur Nikisch, etc. — follow Wagner's ideas regarding the frequent modification of tempo. What these ideas are may be indicated in a few words.

The two typical movements in music are the slow *adagio* and the fast *allegro*. In a certain sense it may be said that the pure adagio cannot be taken too slowly; emotional languor is here the source of delight; the slightest harmonic change is a surprise and gratification. Opposed to this pure adagio is the pure allegro, as we see it especially in Mozart's overtures, such as those to *Figaro* and *Don Juan*: —

[1] Mr. Seidl related to me that when Ferdinand Hiller, the conservative opponent of Wagner, heard him (Seidl) conduct the *Tannhäuser* overture with the correct *tempi*, he exclaimed, "Ja, so gefällt sie mir auch!" — "Ah! that way I like it, too!"

"Of these it is known that they *could not be taken fast enough* to suit Mozart; after he had succeeded in whipping his musicians into the desperate frenzy which to their own surprise at last enabled them to attain the *presto* he insisted upon, he exclaimed: 'Very good! but this evening a trifle faster.' Correct! Just as I said of the pure *adagio* that in an ideal sense it cannot be taken too slowly, so this unmixed, pure *allegro* properly cannot be taken fast enough."

This, however, is true only of the old-fashioned Mozartean allegro, which he calls the "naïve" type. The modern type, foreshadowed in Mozart's symphonies, is fully revealed in Beethoven's *Eroica* and the symphonies following. This is the "sentimental" allegro, that is, an allegro in which more than the rhythmic excitement of a dance-movement is aimed at, and which is in fact a mixture of the adagio and the old allegro, corresponding to the complexity of modern emotions. This is the great and fundamental truth regarding the Beethoven symphonies, which Wagner's predecessors had failed to grasp. They conducted them like *dance-music* with metronomic regularity; while he treated them as *tone-poems*, modifying the tempo according to the *momentary character of the melody*. Here lies the essence of his method: in the *search for the melos, the* MELODY, amid all the rhythmic figurations and complications: whenever that melody has a plaintive or sentimental character, if only for two or three bars, then give those two or three bars a tempo appropriate to a plaintive melody, before proceeding with the regular faster pace. This is the way to teach an orchestra to *sing* an allegro as well as an adagio; for in Beethoven there is "melody in every bar, even in the rests."

Such, in brief, is the fundamental idea of the superb essay *On Conducting*, in which the art of instrumental expression, of *orchestral singing*, is for the first time formulated in scientific terms. And this is the essay which an eminent German critic, Heinrich Ehrlich, called a *Narrenmanifest* — a "fools' manifesto." Readers of the letters to Liszt (especially during the *Lohengrin* period) will find many further suggestive hints, such as this, that the same theme must be played faster or slower according to the dramatic situation; the whole aim being to make operatic music less like dance-music, and more like the varied emotional flow of the spoken drama. Read also Letters 55 and 56 to Uhlig, with instructive remarks on Mendelssohn's way of conducting, culminating in these two sentences which throw a good deal of light on the conductors of the old school in general: —

"Mendelssohn's performance of Beethoven's works was always based only upon their purely musical side, and never upon their poetic contents. . . . He always held on to the letter with the finest of musical cleverness, and thus was like our philologists who, in their exposition of Greek poets, must always point out the literal characters, the particles, the various readings, etc., but never the real contents." [1]

TESTIMONY OF EXPERTS

The magic of Wagner's poetic method of interpretation, combined with his almost military drill, was so great that even some of the leaders of the hostile camp

[1] Further useful hints to conductors may be found in the accounts of the Bayreuth rehearsals given by H. Porges in the *Bayreuther Blätter*. Also in *L'Art de Diriger l'Orchestre*, by M. Kufferath, who noted the peculiarities and method of Hans Richter, Wagner's pupil and chosen conductor for the first Bayreuth Festival.

could not withhold their tribute of admiration. Berlioz's testimony that he conducted "with rare precision and energy" was quoted in an earlier chapter. H. Dorn testified that

"as conductor, Wagner achieved a notable success as early as in his Riga days; his drill ensured great precision — as I could attest best in regard to my own opera, *Der Schöffe von Paris* — and when he stood at his desk, his fiery temperament carried away even the oldest of the orchestral players irresistibly. 'Always fresh, always lively, always a little fresh' — these were his favorite exhortations, which never failed of their proper effect."

Orpheus moved stones with his song, but Wagner, with his conducting, moved Archphilistine Hanslick to exclaim almost rapturously: —

"And an excellent conductor is this man, a conductor with *esprit* and fire, who at the rehearsals, with voice, hands, and feet, carries along his company like a valiant officer and is sure to take his fort. . . . It was a real gratification to hear this *Freischütz* overture, which is usually played off at a monotonous, slovenly pace, for once with a new swing and exceedingly delicate *nuances*. The gradual *crescendo* and *decrescendo* of the horn passage in the introduction; the somewhat retarded pace of the melodious passage in the allegro; the broad sustaining of the two fermatas before the last movement . . . produced a beautiful effect."

This was in 1861. In 1872 Hanslick wrote:[1] —

"Wagner is acknowledged to be a brilliant conductor; he has poetic intentions, and his great authority over the players enables him to carry them into execution. His energetic reproduction of the *Eroica* symphony, with its fine and peculiar *nuances*, also gave us on the whole a genuine pleasure."

Among the prominent German critics who at first opposed Wagner but gradually succumbed before the

[1] *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuosen*, p. 48.

might of his genius, was Louis Ehlert, who delivered himself of this opinion:[1]—

"But when he wrote his destructive pamphlet *On Conducting*, he placed himself, in face of all the world, at the head of the orchestra, and proved that he was a better conductor than all the others. The astounding certainty of feeling which he had for the fundamental *tempo* of the compositions of other masters, was excelled only by the freedom with which he understood how to modify it in the proper place."

By way of still further illustrating Wagner's personality as a conductor, two more extracts may here find a place. Praeger (235) writes:—

"Wagner does not beat in the old-fashioned, automato-metronomic manner. He leaves off beating at times — then resumes again — to lead the orchestra up to a climax, or to let them soften down to a *pianissimo*, as if a thousand invisible threads tied them to his bâton. . . . Let it be well understood that Wagner takes no liberties with the works of the great masters; but his poetico-musical genius gives him, as it were, a second sight into their hidden treasures; his worship for them, and his intense study, are amply proved by his conducting them all without the score."

Dr. Francis Hueffer (of the London *Times*) whose early death was so great a loss to the cause of enlightened musical criticism in England, wrote, in 1872, from Bayreuth:—

"One can agree with the good old Emperor William, who, himself entirely innocent of musical knowledge, said, after Wagner's late performance of Beethoven's C minor symphony in Berlin, in his homely way: 'You see now what a great general can do with his army!' . . .

"Each individual member, from the first violinist to the last drummer, is equally under the influence of a great personal fas-

[1] *Aus der Tonwelt*, II. 207.

cination, which seems to have much in common with the effects of animal magnetism. Every eye is turned towards the master, and it appears as if the musicians derived the notes they play, not from the books on the desks, but from Wagner's glances and movements. I remember reading in Heine a description of Paganini's playing the violin, and how every one in the audience felt as if the virtuoso was looking at and performing for him or her individually. A gun aimed in the direction of many different persons is said to produce a similar illusory effect; and several artists in Wagner's orchestra and chorus assured me that they felt the fascinating spell of the conductor's eye looking at them during the whole performance. Wagner, in common life, is of a rather reserved and extremely gentlemanly deportment; but as soon as he faces his band, a kind of demon seems to take possession of him. He storms, hisses, stamps his foot on the ground, and performs the most wonderful gyratory movements with his arms; and woe to the wretch who wounds his keen ear with a false note! At other times, when the musical waves run smoothly, Wagner ceases almost entirely to beat the time, and a most winning smile is the doubly appreciated reward of his musicians for a particularly well executed passage."

CONCERTS AND OPERAS IN ZÜRICH

I shall now present two pictures of Wagner's activity as conductor during the years 1850 to 1855 — in Zürich and in London. I shall ask my readers to look first on one picture, then on the other: they will then realize what an energetic man of genius can accomplish, with the most inadequate means, on virgin soil, where there is a good will and no organized opposition; and what, on the other hand, must be the result of his efforts if he is placed in a field overgrown with the weeds of so called "tradition" and is hampered by a lot of Philistines and ignorant nobodies in his attempts to pull up the weeds and sow fresh and fragrant flowers in their place.

Although Wagner arrived in Zürich before *Lohengrin* had been performed, he found that the fame of the royal Saxon conductor and composer of *Rienzi*, the *Dutchman*, and *Tannhäuser* had preceded him; for in the very first of his letters to Uhlig, dated August 9, 1849, he writes: "To my great astonishment I have found myself a celebrity here, thanks to the piano-scores of my operas, whole acts of which have been performed repeatedly at concerts and at choral unions." He had not been in Zürich many weeks before these local societies made efforts to secure his services. He consented to conduct Beethoven's A major symphony for them, and concluded he would do something to shame the rich merchants of that city into opening their purses for the establishment of a regular orchestra, over which he would call Uhlig to preside. In the following year he rehearsed a few more symphonies, with an orchestra of mixed professionals and amateurs, and the project was agitated of establishing such an orchestra as he had in mind. In the winter of 1852 he brought out the Fifth Symphony, quite to his satisfaction; indeed, he intimates to Uhlig that it went better than it used to go in Dresden; adding in his playful way, by way of explanation, that in Dresden he always had been compelled by his respectful awe of the royal musicians to suppress half the things he wanted to say at rehearsals. Among other pieces conducted by him in Zürich was the *Coriolanus* overture, which he supplied with a poetic analysis that was printed on the programme.

To the orchestra he had, as was his wont, explained the poetic side of this overture at the rehearsals; the sequel was that when he began to rehearse the *Tannhäuser*

overture with the players, they, of their own accord, asked for a similar explanation, because then they could "play better." The result was most gratifying. As Wagner himself says — and he was a very severe judge: —

"Most striking in every case was the effect of my method upon the executants themselves. I have here in Zürich coached even the most ordinary dance-musicians up to performances of which neither the public nor themselves had previously the slightest anticipation. . . . I must here note that my chief explanations are given at the rehearsals by word of mouth, and at the appropriate passages."

Of the production of his overture he gives this remarkable account: —

"The performance of the *Tannhäuser* overture has now taken place; it surpassed all my expectations, for it really went admirably. You can judge of this by its effect, which was *terrific*. I do not speak of the burst of applause which immediately followed it, but of the symptoms of that effect, which only came gradually to my knowledge. The women, in particular, were turned inside out; the impression made on them was so strong that they had to take refuge in sobs and weeping. Even the rehearsals were crowded, and marvellous were the accounts given to me of the first effect, which expressed itself chiefly as profound sorrowfulness; only after this had found relief in tears, came the agreeable feeling of the highest exuberant joy. Certainly this effect was only made possible by the explanation of the subject-matter of the overture; but — though my own work again made a most powerful impression on me — I was quite astounded at this unusually drastic operation."

He adds that after this experience he began to set some store by this piece of music, and that he really could not think of any other tone-poem capable of exercising a like powerful influence on sensitive, intelligent

natures: in which he was right; for to-day this overture is the most popular of all concert pieces; and in view of this fact, his further remarks are of special interest: —

"But the concert-hall is its place, and not the theatre, where it is a mere prelude to the opera. There I should propose to give only the first tempo of the overture; the rest — in the fortunate event of its being understood — is too much in front of the drama; in the opposite event, too little." [1]

The grandest concerts of the Zürich period took place a year later (May, 1853). Extraordinary preparations were made, prompted by Wagner's great and growing desire to hear at last a few selections from *Lohengrin* adequately performed. The orchestra numbered seventy-two men, many of whom had come on special invitation from various German cities, and the majority of whom were concert-masters and musical directors. They all brought their best instruments. Wagner had had a special acoustic reflector arranged for the occasion, and the effect was most brilliant. The expenses amounted to nine thousand francs.[2]

With such an orchestra, he at last had the satisfaction of hearing parts of *Lohengrin* given to perfection, and he states that their effect on him was so deep that it

[1] The Zürich concerts were in one respect productive of permanent good, for the "programmatic explanations" made for them have been reprinted in Vol. V. of Wagner's works.

[2] It is worth relating that of the Kapellmeisters who were requested to let some of their men go to Zürich, the old-fogy Lachner of Munich alone refused permission, on the ground that "no passes were given to *artisans*." But inasmuch as musicians were, about the same time, wanted at the Zürich theatre, at $11 a month, Lachner must have been mistaken in intimating that orchestral players are not artists. *Artisans* would not work for such a sum. Wagner himself, as we have seen, was offered $40 a month if he would become conductor of the Zürich opera. A brick-layer or grave-digger would have felt justly indignant at such an offer.

required great effort to retain his self-control. For the bridal chorus he had written a new concert ending, and had himself rehearsed the choral selections with his amateurs till they "sang as if possessed by the devil."[1] The applause was deafening, and at the close of the concert the composer-conductor was almost buried amid the flowers that were thrown at him. Twice the concert was repeated, and it might have been given several times more, — for the house was crowded each time, — but the players had to return to their several cities.

This concert[2] had an interesting sequel. The third performance coincided with his fortieth birthday, and the Zürichers took this occasion to express their admiration of the great man whom exile had thrown among them, by presenting to him a golden cup, through the hands of a young lady dressed in white. Afterwards there was a grand torchlight procession, of which he himself gives this amusing account: —

"It was really pretty and festive, and such a thing had never happened before. A stand for the orchestra had been erected before my house (in the Zeltweg); I thought at first they were building a scaffold for me. There was playing and singing — speeches were exchanged, and hurrahs were given me by a countless multitude. I almost wish you could have heard the festal address; it was extremely naïve and cordial; I was celebrated as a genuine Messiah."

Operatic matters[3] naturally interested him more even than these occasional concerts, but the resources of such

[1] Read Letter 111 to Liszt.

[2] A specimen Wagner programme, as arranged by the composer himself, may be found in No. 48 of the Uhlig letters.

[3] Read his suggestive essay, *A Theatre in Zürich* (Vol. V.), in which he discusses the best way of interesting educated people in the theatre, and the kind of works suitable for a small city.

a subordinate opera-house as that in Zürich did not afford any playground for his own difficult works; and so it was only indirectly, in the interest of his pupils, that he came at first into contact with the opera-house. Praeger states repeatedly that Wagner never gave any lessons in his life. This is incorrect; of course he never gave any piano lessons, for the simple reason that he could not play that instrument well enough to do so. But he constantly gave free singing lessons to the vocalists who were learning his rôles — and very valuable lessons they were; what is more important still, he gave personal instruction to three of the greatest conductors of our time — Hans von Bülow, Hans Richter, and Anton Seidl. At the time now under consideration he had assumed charge of two pupils, — Carl Ritter and Bülow. In Ritter, to whom there are numerous references in the letters, he had not only a pupil but a sympathetic friend, who, among other things, spurred him on to *Siegfried* even before Liszt had done so, and who knew how to take his teacher's part, sometimes to the astonishment of the natives.

Bülow had first learnt to admire Wagner at the age of sixteen, at the memorable performance of the Ninth Symphony in Dresden. He also heard his operas in that city, and had the pleasure of meeting the composer, who wrote into his album prophetically: —

"If the genuine, pure enthusiasm for art glows within your breast, it will some day surely burst out as a beautiful flame. But knowledge is what fans these glowing embers into vigorous flames."

A few years later Bülow was one of those who were attracted to Weimar by Liszt's operatic performances, and finally his growing enthusiasm led him directly to

Zürich, with the intention of placing his future in Wagner's hands.

For the benefit of these two pupils, Wagner allowed himself to be persuaded to take a hand in the operatic enterprises at Zürich. He began with operas by Weber and Mozart, and by the composers of the older French school, whom he especially admired, — Boieldieu, Méhul, Cherubini, etc., — and whose works he considered particularly well suited for smaller opera-houses, as being calculated to develop the dramatic as well as the musical faculties of the singers. He carefully attended to the daily rehearsals, and finally concluded, as there were some good singers in the cast, not to leave matters in the hands of his inexperienced pupil Bülow, but to preside over the first performances himself. He even conducted other operas, including *Norma*, which the critics declared "faultless," but which naturally aroused less enthusiasm than his productions of *Dame Blanche*, *Freischütz*, and *Don Juan*,[1] which were more to his taste.

The great success of his *Tannhäuser* overture in the concert-hall led his admirers to urge him to bring out one of his own operas, which he finally consented to do, his choice falling on the *Flying Dutchman*. The directors did all they could to make it a success, and he himself, in his anxiety to have a correct performance, not only worked at the rehearsals like a beaver, — so that he was afterwards completely prostrated, and vowed he would never again engage in practical work of that sort, — but he even paid, with his own money, for several orchestral

[1] On this occasion he used his own edition of *Don Juan*, as revised by him for Dresden. The principal changes made in this version are described in a letter to Uhlig dated Feb. 26, 1852.

players, who had to be engaged in other cities.[1] The opera — as an *opera* — was a brilliant success; so much so that it was repeated four times in the course of a week, at specially increased prices, and many more performances might have been given had not an engagement at Geneva called away the company.

And yet (as the Philistines will read to their astonishment in No. 62 of the Uhlig letters), he was not satisfied, — for the reason already intimated: that is, the singers interpreted the work simply as a musical score, — an opera, — its dramatic features being beyond their powers. But the composer was consoled for this inevitable disappointment by the sympathy of the women. I have already cited his remarks regarding the impression made on the women who heard the *Tannhäuser* overture. So again, in speaking of the *Dutchman*, he says: "The women were, of course, again in the lead: after the third performance, they crowned me with laurel, and smothered me in flowers." Similar references to women are numerous in his correspondence of this period: —

"Yesterday," he writes on March 25, 1852, "I received a letter from a lady of aristocratic birth, who thanks me for my writings; 'they have been her salvation'; she declares herself a thorough-paced revolutionary. So it is always women who, with regard to me, have their hearts in the right place, whilst I must almost entirely give up men." Again he says: "With women's hearts it has always gone well with my art; and probably because, amid the prevailing vulgarity, it is always most difficult for women to let their souls become as thoroughly hardened as has been so completely the case with our political men-folk. Women are indeed

[1] Read Letter 62 to Uhlig, and see how the Dresden Philistines interpreted even this self-sacrifice in behalf of an artistic ideal as "vanity," and as a blemish in his character!

the music of life; they receive everything in a more open and unlimited manner, that they may enrich it with their sympathy."

In another letter we read, concerning women, that they alone "now and then help me to an illusion, for concerning men I can no longer cherish any." In still another: —

"Again it is always the 'ever-womanly' which fills me with sweet illusions and warm thrills of life's delight. The moist, shining eye of a woman often saturates me with fresh hope." And once more: "Believe me, this maiden is far ahead of you, and why? By birth, because she is a woman. She was born human; you and every man nowadays are born Philistines, and slowly and painfully do we, poorest of creatures, succeed in becoming human. Only women, who have retained what they were at their birth, can instruct us; and if they did not exist, we men, in our paper swathings, would go to the ground past praying for."

FOUR MONTHS IN LONDON

Just before the close of the year 1854, he was surprised by a letter from London asking him if he would assume the function of conductor of the Philharmonic Society for the next season. This position had been held by Mendelssohn, Sterndale Bennett, Costa, and other noted musicians, and was much coveted. Before answering Yes or No, Wagner, Yankee-like, asked two questions in turn: (1) Would they have a second conductor for the trivial pieces? (2) Would he be able to have as many rehearsals as he considered necessary to secure good performances? In the meantime he asked the advice of Liszt, who urged him to accept.

What had happened in London that the directors of the most conservative musical society in that city should seek the assistance of the most radical and revolutionary musi-

cian the world has ever seen? It came about in this way. The conductor, Costa, had resigned, and a new man of at least equal note was to be found. Praeger claims that he was the first to suggest Wagner. Dr. Hueffer relates[1] that

"at a meeting of the directors many names were mentioned; some suggested Lindpainter, others Berlioz; others insisted upon appointing a musician of English birth, or at least one residing in England. At last Mr. Sainton . . . [leader of the orchestra and one of the directors] rose to his feet and named Wagner. He himself had no personal cognizance of his capacity, but, as Mr. Sainton remarked, a man who had been so much abused must have something in him. This sentiment was received with acclamation, and it was unanimously resolved that a leap in the dark should be made."

Up to this time Wagner had been practically unknown in England — a country which does not move with startling velocity in musical matters.

"Only half a year ago," wrote Liszt (Jan. 25, 1855), "people still shook their heads, yes, some hissed, at the performance of the *Tannhäuser* overture (conducted by Costa); Klindworth and Remeny were almost the only ones who had the courage to applaud loudly, and to brave the old-established philistinism of the Philharmonic! Well, now the tone will be changed, and you will infuse new life into Old England and the Old Philharmonic."

A rash prophecy!

The directors followed up the matter promptly, and actually went so far as to send Mr. Anderson, their treasurer, to Zürich, to make the preliminary arrangements. With the promise of a thousand dollars for four months' service he succeeded in getting the acceptance of the

[1] *Half a Century of Music in England*, p. 42.

unwilling composer — unwilling, because, as he wrote to Liszt, "it is not my mission to go to London to conduct Philharmonic concerts even if — as is desired — I produce at them compositions of my own, — for I have written no concert pieces." The paltry sum offered ("I have sold myself at a very low price," he wrote) would have hardly tempted him to interrupt the composition of the *Walküre* for a task so much less congenial; what finally persuaded him to go was the hope of making this undertaking the entering wedge for a series of performances in German of his early operas, especially *Lohengrin*, which he himself was so anxious to hear. He little dreamt that almost forty years would have to elapse before English musical taste would outgrow its absurdly exclusive Handel and Mendelssohn worship sufficiently to make possible a financially successful series of Wagner performances in the original language (1892).

Mr. Anderson immediately telegraphed the news of the successful engagement to London, where it created a great commotion. The new Philharmonic Society had already engaged Berlioz for their concerts; now the Old Philharmonic tried to overtrump their rivals in the choice of a revolutionary musician, — a man, too, who had expressed his disapproval of Mendelssohn, the English god of music! This was not to be tolerated. The Philistines immediately sharpened their quills, preparing to dip them into gall even before Wagner's arrival. Mr. James Davison, who enjoyed great influence on account of his vigorous style and his dual position as the musical editor of the leading political paper (*Times*) and the leading musical paper (*Musical World*), opened his batteries with an article in which he made such statements as these: —

"It is well known that Richard Wagner has little respect for any music but his own; that he holds Beethoven to have been a child until he wrote the posthumous quartets and the Mass in D, which he (Wagner) regards as his own *starting-points* (!) . . . and that, finally he is earnestly bent upon upsetting all the accepted forms and canons of art . . . in order the more surely to establish his doctrine that rhythm is superfluous, counterpoint a useless bore, and every musician, ancient and modern, himself excepted, either an impostor or a useless blockhead."

These statements — and they are but samples of what most of the "critical" articles of the London papers contained — were, of course, malicious and ridiculous falsehoods; but truthfulness is a virtue with which Wagner's opponents were never on very friendly terms. As for the public, what else could it do but believe the musical "experts"? Wagner was given a bad name even before he appeared on the scene to plead his own cause: in consequence, the next four months became a period of misery and constant annoyance conspicuous even in his wretched life of disappointments.

The most complete and interesting account of this visit to London was written by the late F. Praeger, who devotes about fifty pages of his *Wagner as I Knew Him* to this episode. Special value attaches to this account because Praeger was Wagner's informal agent in arranging details with the Society, and because several letters from him to Praeger are printed in these chapters. In one of these letters, Wagner, still in Zürich, remarks: —

"That the directors of the Philharmonic have no idea whom they have engaged, I am perfectly sure; but they will soon discover. They might have been more generous, for if these gentlemen intentionally go abroad to find a celebrity, they ought to have been inclined to spend a little extra."

He also asks Praeger to sound the directors regarding his plan of giving a complete Wagner concert, either as one of the Philharmonic series, or as an extra, on his own account. Praeger saw the directors and found that they "feared hazarding the reputation of their concerts by the devotion of a whole evening to Wagner's works," but were willing to place some of his pieces on the regular programmes. To Praeger's invitation to make his home his own, the composer replied: —

"As you open your hospitable doors to me, I shall avail myself of your kindness, and if you will let me stay until I have found a suitable apartment, I shall be grateful to you, and shall heartily beg pardon of your amiable wife for my intrusion. I shall be in London in the first days of March. I sincerely repeat to you that I have no great expectations, for really I do not count any more upon anything in this world. But I shall be delighted to gain your closer friendship. The English language I do not know, and I am totally without gift for modern languages, and at present am averse to learning any, on account of the strain on my memory. I must help myself through with French."

In his next letter he says, in regard to his residence in Praeger's house, that

"As a number of strangers are likely to call, I hope to escape them in solitude of unknown regions. You must not think this strange, as I isolate myself at home the whole morning, and do not permit a soul to come near me when at work, unless it be Peps [his dog]. You will remember, too, when I did something similar to this in Dresden, and left the world, to go into retirement with August Roeckel."

He had promised to be in London a week before the first concert, and kept his promise to the hour by arriving on March 5. He stayed some time at Praeger's (31 Milton St., Dorset Square) and afterwards took rooms

at 22 Portland Terrace, Regent's Park. On the morning after his arrival, Praeger had some difficulty in persuading him to lay aside his "revolutionary" slouched hat, and wear such headgear as became the leader of London's most conservative musical society. Then they drove to the residence of Mr. Anderson, where all went well until a "prize-symphony" by Lachner was mentioned as one of the pieces selected for performance at the concerts. At this

> "Wagner sprang from his seat, as if shot from a gun, exclaiming loudly and angrily, 'Have I therefore left my quiet seclusion in Switzerland to cross the sea to conduct a prize-symphony by Lachner? no; never! If that be a condition of the bargain, I at once reject it and return. What brought me away was the eagerness to hear a far-famed orchestra and to perform worthily the works of the great masters, but no Kapellmeister music; and that of a Lachner — bah!' Mr. Anderson sat aghast in his chair, looking with bewildered surprise on this unexpected outbreak of passion, delivered with extraordinary volubility, partly in French and partly in German."

Praeger gave a more tranquillizing translation of it to Anderson, and peace was restored by the promise that the offensive symphony would be given up.

It must not be supposed that Wagner's opposition to this piece was instigated by the remembrance of Lachner's refusal to let his musicians attend that Zürich concert referred to in the last chapter. His mind was entirely above such petty revenge. He honestly and heartily detested the artificial, shallow, empty, but *correct* symphonies which fourth-rate musicians like Lachner could write by the yard; and, as Hueffer has well remarked, "the mere invention of the incomparable term *Kapellmeistermusik* for this kind of production would

secure Wagner a place amongst satirical writers." It was to avoid conducting such trash that he had been anxious to have an assistant — a point which he had been obliged to waive. The eight programmes which he had to conduct are given in full in Praeger's volume; and a perusal of them shows that his fears regarding their probably mixed and partly trivial character were realized.

"A Beethoven symphony certainly gives me great pleasure," he wrote to Fischer, a few weeks later, "but a whole concert of this kind, with everything which it includes, deeply disgusts me; and with great inner vexation, I see myself compelled to conduct stuff which I thought I should never have to perform again."

Next to the miscellaneous character of the programmes, which were utterly inartistic in their arrangement, what annoyed him was their interminable length. This, combined with the expensiveness of London players, made it impossible to have more than one rehearsal for each piece. "Perfectly satisfactory performances, which alone could reward me," he wrote to Liszt, "I cannot give anyway; we have too few rehearsals[1] for that, and everything proceeds too mechanically." For the second concert alone, at which the Ninth Symphony was given, he succeeded, with much difficulty, in getting two rehearsals — of the same work of which he had had dozens in Dresden, while Habeneck of the Paris Conservatoire had kept at it for several years! No wonder that he had to write to Fischer that "the choruses were miserable. If I only

[1] The extraordinarily conservative and immutable character of the London Philharmonic Society is revealed in the curious fact that Mr. Cowen should have resigned from its conductorship in 1892, because he could no longer tolerate the same absurd policy complained of by Wagner in 1855! That such a society should have invited Wagner to be its leader, was more than a miracle — it was a huge joke

had your Dresden Palm-Sunday choir!" With such scant rehearsals it was impossible to give performances of any classical masterworks except in Mendelssohn's way of passing over everything hurriedly and mechanically, concealing defects as well as possible. With this the Philharmonic audiences had apparently been contented hitherto, and Wagner's attempts to introduce more poetic readings could not possibly be carried out with such few rehearsals.

To add insult to injury, the directors, intimidated by the critics, and ignorant of the fact that Wagner was an infinitely greater genius than Mendelssohn, constantly irritated him by holding up their Jewish idol as a model to him; if he chose a faster or slower tempo than the orchestra had previously taken, or introduced a poetic *nuance*, he was remonstrated with and requested to take things in the regular way, since Mendelssohn himself had taken them so: as he complains to Liszt: —

"'Sir, we are not used to this'; that is the eternal echo I hear. Neither can the orchestra recompense me: it consists almost exclusively of Englishmen, *i.e.* clever machines which can never be got into the right swing: handicraft and business kill everything. Then there is the public, which, I am assured, is very favorably inclined towards me, but can never be got out of itself, which accepts the most emotional like the most tedious things, without ever showing that it has received a real impression. And, in addition to this, the ridiculous Mendelssohn worship."

He was found fault with for other things. "We have been informed on the best authority," writes Dr. Hueffer,[1] "that Wagner, when he had to conduct a work by Mendelssohn, deliberately and slowly put on a pair of white kid

[1] *Half a Century of Music in England*, p. 51.

gloves to indicate the formal, or, one might say fashionable, character of the music." This amusing and harmless bit of irony on the part of the Mendelssohn-tormented genius, of course aroused the ire of the press anew. Then, again, he was found fault with for his "presumption" in conducting Beethoven's scores by heart — a feat which "even Mendelssohn" had been unable to accomplish. He was given to understand that this was considered a slight on the classical composers; and after a rehearsal of one of Beethoven's symphonies, he yielded in so far to the pressure brought to bear on him as to promise to bring along a score at the public performance. He did so. After the performance the parties who had urged him to use a score crowded around him with congratulations on the excellent result of their advice — until one of them happened to glance at the score on his desk, which proved to be — Rossini's *Barber of Seville!*[1]

The Philharmonic orchestra was not a bad one as orchestras went in that day; but how far it was from the modern standard — which alone could have satisfied Wagner — may be inferred from such a fact as this that Concert-master Sainton had to finger certain passages in the *Tannhäuser* overture for each one of the first violinists! Furthermore, the orchestra had been allowed to fall into slovenly habits by its previous conductors, Mendelssohn included. On this topic the reader will find some very instructive remarks in Wagner's essay *On Conducting*, from which I will quote a few lines. Referring to the

[1] This anecdote, if not literally true, is at any rate *ben trovato*. Conducting symphonies without a score is no longer so rare a feat as to seem an insult or a crime. Eminent Wagnerian conductors like Mr. Seidl, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Nikisch do it occasionally, and Hans Richter does it habitually; nay, he conducts whole Wagner operas without a score.

Mendelssohn "traditions," followed by the London orchestra, he says: —

"The music poured on like water from a public fountain; to hold back was impossible, and every allegro ended as a veritable presto. To interfere with this custom was a painful duty; for when the correct and properly-modified tempo was introduced, all the faults of execution and expression which had been hidden amid the previous flow of the music-fountain, were suddenly revealed. The orchestra never played otherwise than mezzo forte; never was there a real forte or a real piano."

Praeger relates that "at first the orchestra could not understand the pianissimo required in the opening of the *Lohengrin* prelude; and then the crescendos and diminuendos, which Wagner insisted upon having, surprised the executants. They turned inquiringly to each other, seemingly annoyed at his fastidiousness." They were willing to learn, however, and after the first concert Wagner testified in a letter to Liszt: —

"The orchestra alone interests me here; it has learned to love me and is enthusiastically in my favor." And again, when all was over, and he was back in Zürich, he wrote of the orchestra: "I could see that it was always most willing to follow my intentions, as far as bad habits and want of time would allow."

Things went on as well as could be expected under such circumstances, until the fourth concert came along, on April 30. The programme of this was a characteristic Philharmonic monstrosity — a batch of pieces. good, bad, and indifferent — enough to last three or four hours, and jumbled together without the slightest regard for artistic sequence or contrast; to wit: (1) symphony by Lucas; (2) Romanza, Meyerbeer; (3) Nonetto, Spohr; (4) Aria, Beethoven; (5) Overture, Weber; (6) Symphony, Bee-

thoven; (7) Duetto, Mozart; (8) Overture, Onslow!! This programme came very near sending Wagner precipitately back to the Alps.

"On that evening," he wrote to Fischer, "I was really in a furious rage, that after the A major symphony I should have had to conduct a miserable vocal piece and a trivial overture of Onslow's; and, as is my way, in deepest dudgeon, I told my friends aloud that I had that day conducted for the last time; that on the morrow I should send in my resignation, and journey home. By chance a concert singer, R. — a young German Jew — was present: he caught up my words and conveyed them all hot to a newspaper reporter. Ever since then rumors have been flying about in the German papers, which have misled even you. I need scarcely tell you that the representations of my friends, who escorted me home, succeeded in making me withdraw the hasty resolution conceived in a moment of despondency."

The gunpowder of this explosion came from the growing feeling of disappointment of all his hopes. A survey of the situation showed him that what had been practically his sole motive in accepting the London engagement — the hope of making it the entering wedge for a series of performances of his operas in German — was an impossibility. Not even in the inadequate concert-hall was he able to introduce himself properly, the *Tannhäuser* overture and a few short selections from *Lohengrin* being all that the directors saw fit to place on their eight programmes. Consequently he was condemned to the fruitless and painful task of conducting interminable concerts of poorly rehearsed music much of which he despised, while he could not even impose on the performers his own style of interpretation. Moreover he found it impossible, under such circumstances, to continue his work on the *Walküre*. No wonder he wrote to Liszt: —

"I live here like one of the lost souls in hell.[1] I never thought that I could sink again so low. The misery I feel in having to live in these disgusting surroundings is beyond description, and I now realise that it was a sin, a crime, to accept this invitation to London, which in the luckiest case must have led me away from my real path."

Philistines find it difficult to understand such a state of mind. Indeed, Mr. Joseph Bennett considers the above as "language which must strike every reader as ridiculously exaggerated"; and he frankly declares that if Wagner was not happy it was all his own fault; he was guilty of "childish petulance," and was a "*self-tormented man.*" Mr. Bennett is quite right. Here was a man "abusing the people whose money he, of his own free will, was taking." This was certainly outrageous, especially when we bear in mind that in Zürich he had been offered only ten dollars a week for his services as operatic conductor, and that five dollars a week was all he earned during the four months he devoted to writing his *Opera and Drama;* while here in London the ungrateful man actually received no less than £200 for 102 days, or $9.50 a day! And what folly to growl because he could have only one rehearsal for each concert; for did not that leave him more time for other things, while he got his $9.50 a day all the same? Why, again, should he have wished to produce a *whole* opera of his in London, when the critics made such mince-meat of the fragments they heard? What would the critics have said of the whole of *Tannhäuser* when their leader wrote in the *Times* of May 16, 1855:—

[1] He was reading Dante's *Inferno* at this time, and wrote Liszt a long letter regarding it, shortly afterwards (No. 190).

"Of the overture to *Tannhäuser* we have already spoken, and the execution last night gave us no cause to modify our first impression. A more inflated display of extravagance and noise has rarely been submitted to an audience, and it was a pity to hear so magnificent an orchestra engaged in almost fruitless attempts at accomplishing things which, even if readily practicable, would lead to nothing." And once more, on June 12: "Even the most wonderful execution could not make this *Tannhäuser* music acceptable, and we sincerely hope that no execution, however superb, will ever make such senseless discord pass, in England, for a manifestation of art and genius."

All this of the *Tannhäuser* overture, now the most popular piece in the concert repertory! Of course, when Wagner, who was then engaged on the *Walküre*, read in the leading London papers such "criticisms" on an opera written ten years before, he ought to have smiled and felt happy. If he did not, he was "self-tormented."

I have called this general situation the gunpowder which led to the explosion and the intended resignation after the fourth concert. But the tiny spark which set off the explosion was no doubt an incident of that concert thus related by Praeger: —

"During the aria from *Les Huguenots*, the tenor, Herr Reichardt, after a few bars' rest, did not retake his part at the proper moment, upon which Wagner turned to him, — of course without stopping the band, — whereupon the singer made gestures to the audience indicating *that the error lay with Wagner*. . . . Wagner was well aware of the unfriendliness of a section of the critics, and in all probability capital would be made out of this. At the end of the first part of the concert I went to him in the artists' room. His high-pitched excitement and uncontrolled utterances, it was easy to foresee, boded no good. And when we reached home after the concert, there ensued a positive storm of passion. Wagner at his best was impulsive and vehement; suffering such a miserable insinuation as to his incapacity, he grew furious."

He was determined to return to Zürich at once, and only for his wife's sake, his three principal friends, Sainton, Lüders, and Praeger, finally persuaded him to remain.

And now note the characteristic echo of this event in Germany. Other nations are proud of their great men — even if they are not so very great. Not so the Germans. They were at that time engaged in the national sport of systematically ignoring the greatest philosopher their country has ever produced, — Arthur Schopenhauer, — and at the same time they were trying to kill off their greatest composer — not by ignoring him, which is not so easy in the case of an opera-composer, but by doing everything in their power to cripple and malign him. Liszt had written to Wagner that "the English edition of Philistinism is not a bit better than the German, and the chasm between the public and us remains equally wide everywhere." But I believe that Liszt was unjust to the British Philistine. Had Wagner been an *Englishman* trying to make his fame in a *German* city, Liszt could have hardly written as he did after this "resignation" incident: "In Düsseldorf I was told that you had already left London! The envious Philistines were extremely delighted with this news." So they were with the *Tannhäuser* fiasco in Paris, five years later; with the financial failure of the Bayreuth Festival in 1876; and with all the misfortunes that pursued him to the end of his life.

Towards the close of his engagement in London, matters took a more favorable turn, thanks partly to the kindness of the Queen, and partly to that love of fair-play and common decency which is one of the noblest

traits of the English mind. The disgraceful hounding of the poor composer by the London critics had the opposite effect of what they intended. While they, with a few honorable exceptions, were engaged in mud-throwing, the public became more and more demonstratively favorable to the persecuted master. At the fifth concert, after the *Tannhäuser* overture, tumultuous applause followed, the audience rising and waving handkerchiefs; indeed, Mr. Anderson informed Praeger "that he had never known such a display of excitement at a Philharmonic concert." But better things still were to follow. At the seventh concert the *Tannhäuser* overture was repeated by command of the Queen, who attended with the Prince Consort, although she appeared at such concerts hardly once a year. Concerning this event, we must quote Wagner's own narrative to Fischer: —

"If in itself it was extremely gratifying that the Queen should pay no regard to my highly compromised political position (which had been dragged to light with great malignity by the *Times*), and that she should without hesitation assist at a public performance under my direction, then her further behavior towards me afforded me at last an affecting compensation for all the contrarieties and vulgar animosities which I have here endured.

"She and Prince Albert, who both sat immediately facing the orchestra, applauded after the *Tannhäuser* overture — with which the first part concluded — with graciousness almost amounting to a challenge, so that the public broke out into lively and prolonged applause. During the interval the Queen summoned me to the *Salon*, and received me before her Court with the cordial words: 'Your composition has enraptured me.'"

He adds that in a long conversation, in which Prince Albert also took part, the Queen further inquired about his works, and asked if it would not be possible to give

his operas in an Italian version in London; to which he was obliged to give a negative answer (for his experiences had shown him that England was not yet ripe for such a scheme). He concludes: "At the end of the concert the Queen and the Prince applauded me again most courteously. . . . The last concert is on the twenty-fifth, and I leave on the twenty-sixth, so as to resume in my quiet retreat my sadly interrupted work."

Further interesting details regarding this event are given in a letter to Liszt (No. 191), in which he says of the Queen and the Prince that "they were really the first persons in England who dared to come out openly and without reserve in my favor: if you consider that they were dealing with a politically notorious individual, against whom a warrant was out on the charge of high treason, you will appreciate my sentiment when I say that I feel the most cordial gratitude towards both for their actions." He justly looked on the attitude of the audience as "a demonstration against the critics," and thus describes the scene at the close of the last concert: —

"The orchestral players arose solemnly and joined with the large audience that filled the hall in an outburst of applause which continued so long that it actually caused me some embarrassment. Then all the players came to have a parting handshake, and afterwards men and women from the audience gave me their hands, which I pressed cordially. Thus this — essentially most absurd — London expedition finally won the aspect of a triumph for me, in which I was at any rate pleased by the attitude of independence which the public assumed against the critics. . . . With the Queen I was truly delighted; to some friends here I myself gave great pleasure, and let that suffice. The *New Philharmonic*," he adds sarcastically, "would like to have me next season: what more could I want?"

The Old Philharmonic does not appear to have renewed its offer.

When Liszt heard of the favorable ending, he, with his usual optimism ("all's well that ends well"), urged his friend to make arrangements for another season; but nothing could have induced Wagner to repeat the distasteful experiment. The pronounced favor of the Queen, and the sympathy of the public might have made him a popular hero the following season, but he had higher ambitions than conducting endless programmes of miscellaneous pieces inartistically jumbled together, and being, in addition, hampered in the execution of his intentions, and viciously attacked in the united press for all that was new and most poetic in his readings. With almost the sole exception of the *Daily News* (of which George Hogarth, the father-in-law of Dickens, was musical editor), the press was hostile;[1] and to what a disreputable degree these wretched scribblers carried their animosity may be inferred from the fact that Davison characterized 1855 as "one of the most unprosperous seasons"; whereas Dr. Hueffer writes: "I have been assured by Mr. W. G. Cusins, Master of the Queen's Music, and for a number of years conductor of the Philharmonic Society that, in spite of the attacks of the press, the season of 1855 was, in a pecuniary sense, an extremely successful one." We shall see in a later chapter how Davison ultimately became a penitent friend of Wagner's, and that his sins were readily forgiven by his victim. But this tardy reconciliation could hardly compensate one so acutely sensitive to criticism as Wagner for all

[1] Some of the opinions of Chorley (of the *Athenæum*) and others are reprinted in Praeger's entertaining chapters.

the poisoned arrows shot into his heart in 1855, from the offices of the *Times* and *Musical World;* such as: —

"The result has been a series of performances unparalleled for inefficiency"; "Richard Wagner *is not a musician at all*"; "this excommunication of pure melody"; "absolute chaos"; "wild, extravagant, and demagogic cacophony"; "*Lohengrin* . . . is an incoherent mass of rubbish"; "*Tannhäuser* . . . is tedious beyond endurance"; "The *Flying Dutchman* . . . the most hideous and detestable of the whole"; and so on.

END OF VOL. I.

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